THE FALSE MEMORY OF THE HOLOCAUST

RUTH FRANKLIN

WHY GAY MARRIAGE WON'T DIVIDE AMERICA

E.J. GRAFF

WWW.TNR.COM ▶ MAY 31, 2004

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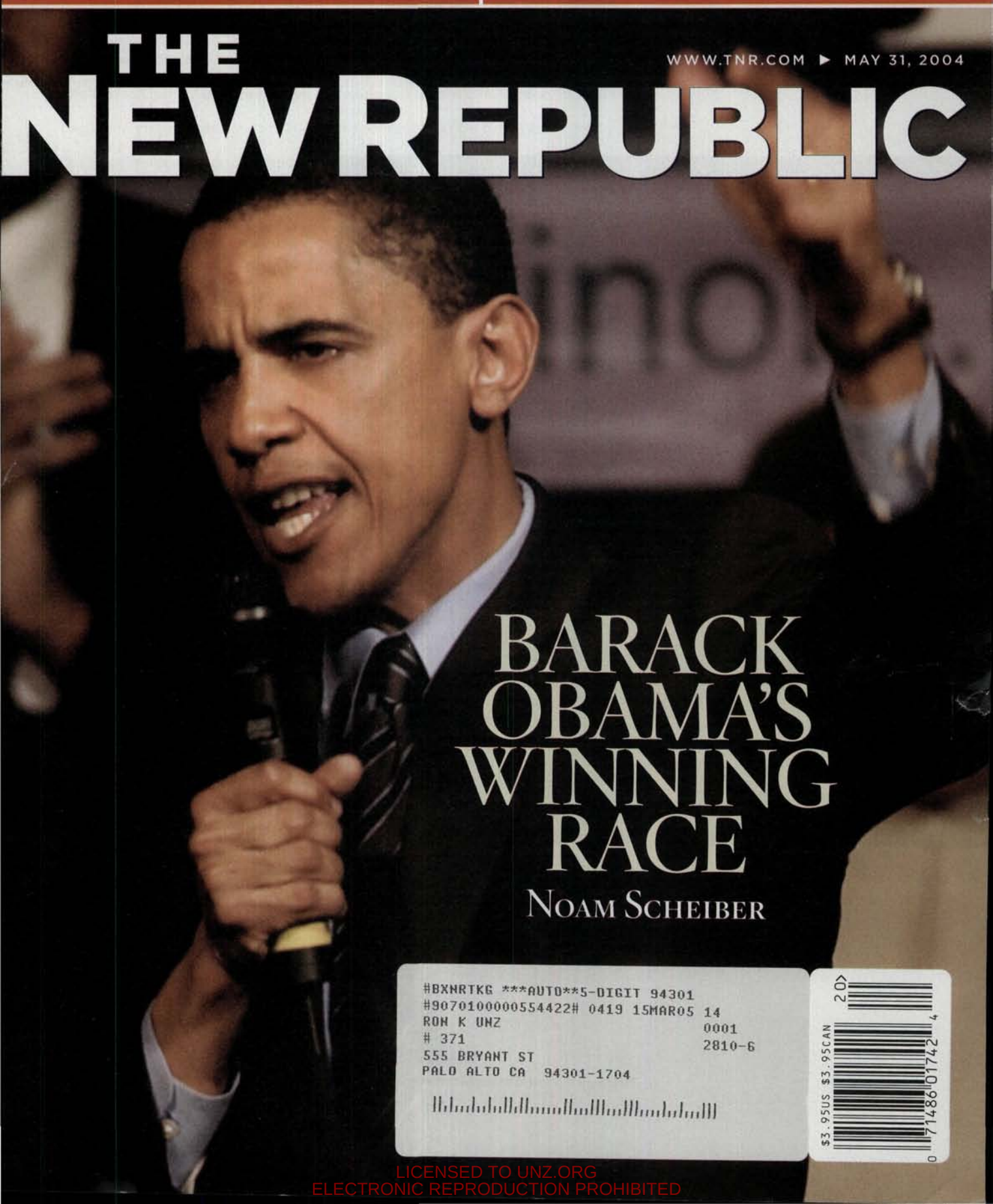

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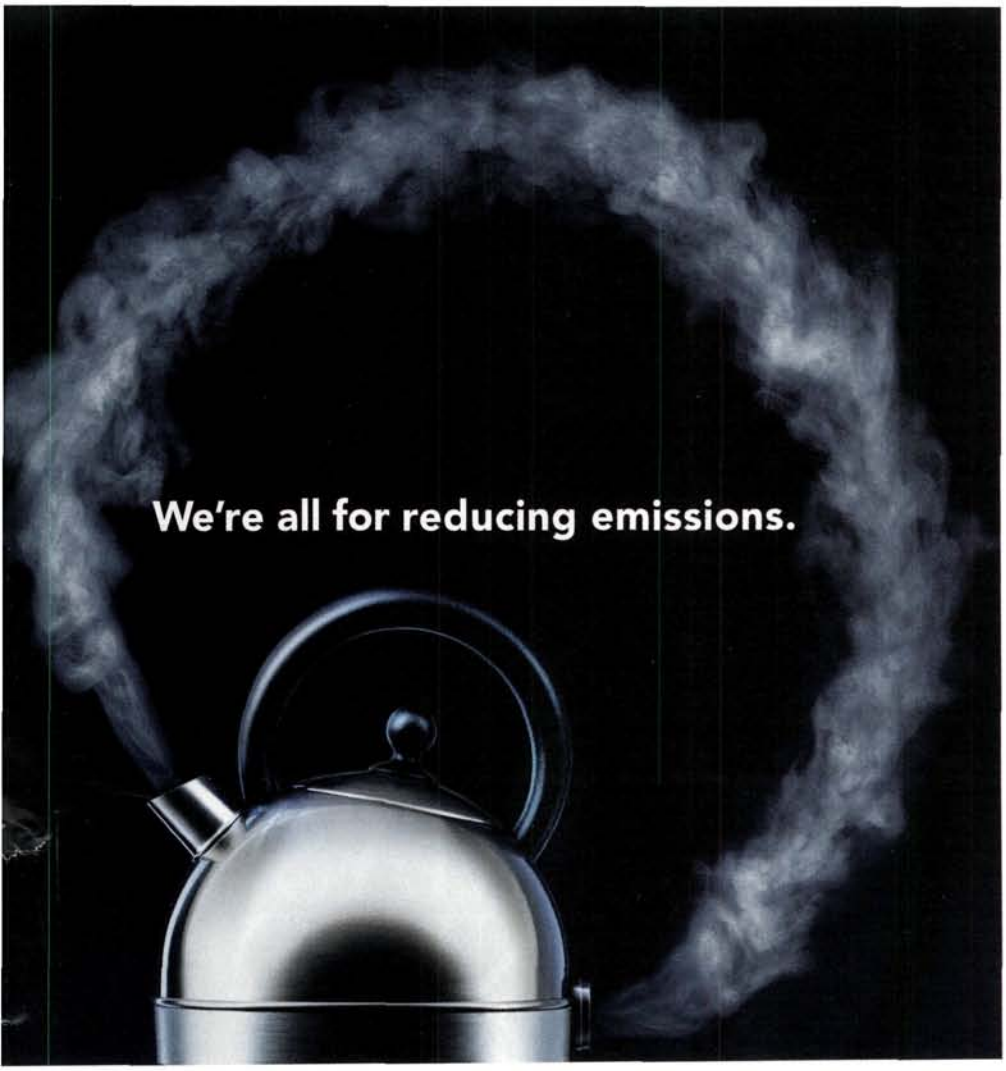

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CORRESPONDENCE

EXTREME MAKEOVER

AS A FOLKLORIST, I AM ACCUSTOMED to looking for cultural patterns. When I read Jackson Lears's astute review article delineating the growing popularity of various forms of cosmetic surgery and "enhancement technologies," I could not help but see the present U.S. venture in Iraq as a giant, extreme makeover ("The Resurrection of the Body," April 26). It is one thing to change one's nose or even one's house; it is quite another to attempt to make over an entire country, especially if not all of the country's citizens want to be made over. Historically, it has been a classic characteristic of colonialist powers to seek to impose their laws or religion upon conquered peoples. It is always hard to recognize the arrogance that is part of what anthropologists know as ethnocentrism. The Greek historian Herodotus, thought by some to be the father of anthropology, had it about right when he wrote in *The Persian Wars*, "If one were to offer men to choose out of all the customs in the world such as seemed to them the best, they would examine the whole number, and end by preferring their own; so convinced are they that their own usages surpass those of all others." Maybe, just maybe, democracy is not for export.

ALAN DUNDES
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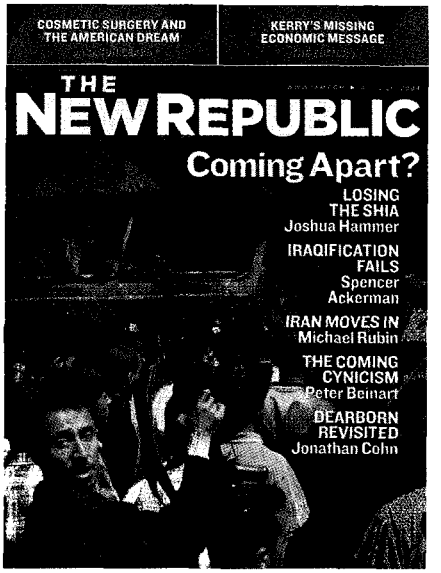
ZERO GRAVITY

LEON WIESELTIER MAY ACT AS THE unwitting prophet, awakening Christians in America with his article "Under God and Over" (April 12 & 19). He criticizes liberal and conservative enemies of religion who think themselves serious about religion when, in fact, they are not serious enough. And he pinpoints a major sickness in modern American Christianity: churchgoers who fail to realize "that religion is not only a way of life but also a worldview," and thus refrain from the dogmatism that true religion demands. Of course, Wieseltier would undoubtedly argue with any Christian's dogmatic assertions about God. But he would at least honor the integrity of a belief truly believed. Christians must understand that the debate is not about whether Christianity is more practical for moral living than atheism. The debate concerns the truth claims of both Christianity and atheism—and the recent court case over the Pledge of Allegiance is a poignant reminder of how easily truth can be manipulated by a pragmatism that seeks to place religion at the service of morality. So, from an ardent Christian, thanks for the wake-up call.

TRENTON BLAKE HUNTER
Overland Park, Kansas



OUT OF THEIR ELEMENT

MICHAEL LEVI CORRECTLY POINTS out how Congress desperately needs a nonpartisan organization to advise on science and technology ("Without Agency," May 3). The alternative is to rely on partisan lobbyists for an "education." Levi describes the failed attempts to revive the disbanded Office of Technology Assessment (OTA). Revival of the OTA should not be the issue. By learning from the OTA experience, Congress can, and should, create an even more effective organization. There is already a technology assessment pilot underway within the General Accounting Office (GAO), and Congress is considering legislation that would make this arrangement permanent. Moreover, debate in recent years among prominent thinkers from Congress and the scientific community has produced several promising alternative models for effective organizations. It is time for Congress to move past the dispute over an organization that has not existed since 1995 and create something that works today, whether it is in the GAO or elsewhere. Otherwise, Americans will continue to watch dangerously uninformed members of Congress misrepresenting critical issues, including homeland security, health care, defense, energy, agriculture, and the environment.

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OUTCLASSED

IF JAMES WOOD BELIEVES THAT George Smiley and Control are the same person, he hasn't read John le Carré very attentively ("The Little Drummer Boy," April 5). Control was the head of the Circus and Smiley was his assistant, prevented from succeeding his boss by a variety of political manipulators—including, most prominently, a Soviet double agent. After exposing that agent, Smiley was briefly installed as director, only to be maneuvered out of it by more politics. Wood's article is insightful. But, by muddling the particulars of le Carré's greatest creation, he misses the essence of Smiley: the man of superior talent repeatedly defeated by those of less depth but greater political skill. In other words, the man of character is always at the mercy of the vulgar. It is a kind of disguised snobbery, like the reflexive anti-Americanism that Wood accurately points out.

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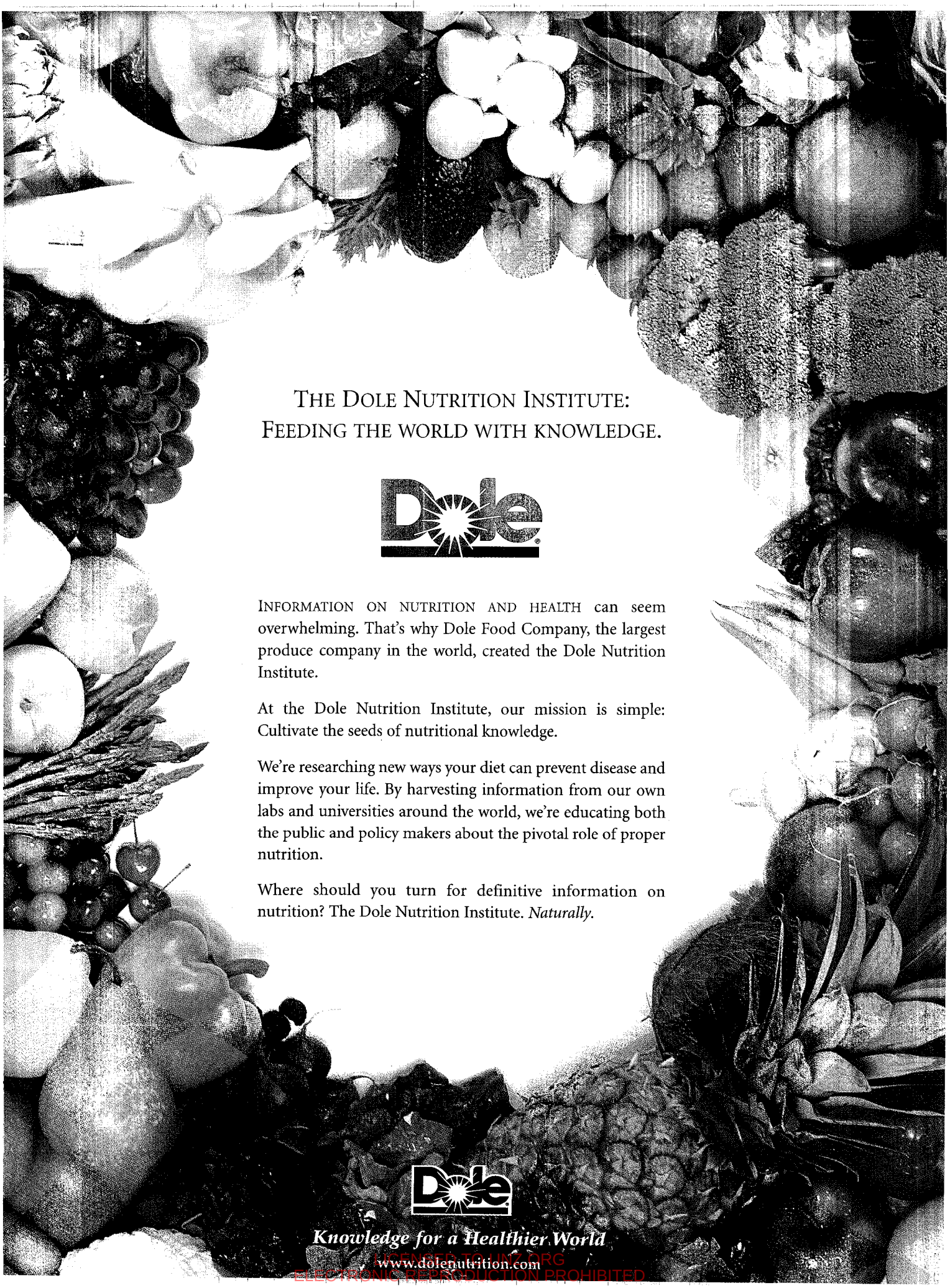

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Outsourcing

TRB
FROM WASHINGTON

CONSERVATIVES HAVE BEEN hearing about Abu Ghraib for three weeks now, and they've had just about enough. To hear them tell it, the media is taking one isolated, unfortunate event and using it to undermine the military, the Bush administration, and American morale. They're tired of introspecting and apologizing, and they want to refocus on the real bad guys. As *Weekly Standard* editor Bill Kristol put it on Fox News this Sunday, "We've got to win this war. And it is insane for this country to be obsessing about a small prisoner-abuse scandal."

The problem is that the conservative insistence that the Abu Ghraib abuse was isolated or "small" is more a statement of faith than of fact. In recent days, *The New Yorker* and *Newsweek* have alleged that top Pentagon officials authorized interrogators to terrify and humiliate high-value detainees throughout the international prison system the United States established after September 11. If the right wants to defend this policy, which the Red Cross called "tantamount to torture," that's one thing. But it can't just demand that the media change the subject.

One reason it can't is that a Canadian inquiry is about to draw attention to another kind of U.S. complicity in torture. On September 26, 2002, Maher Arar, a Canadian citizen born in Syria, was flying home to Montreal from a family trip to Tunisia. During a stopover at New York's JFK Airport, he was detained by American immigration officials, who questioned him about connections to Al Qaeda, then threw him into Brooklyn's Metropolitan Detention Center. Two weeks later, he was flown to Washington and then to Amman, where, he claims, the Jordanians "blindfolded and chained me, and put me in a van. ... Every time I tried to talk, they beat me." Hours later, he was transferred again, this time to Syria. The Syrians placed him in a nearly pitch-black, three-by-six cell. Periodically, they beat him with an electrical cable and threatened him with electric shocks and a device called "the metal chair," which stretches the spine. During one such session, he confessed to attending an Al Qaeda training camp in Afghanistan (a confession he now disavows). Ten months later, he was released back to Canada, where he has not been charged with any crime. Next month, the Canadian government will launch an inquiry into the case, which has garnered front-page coverage north of the border.

The inquiry will spotlight a policy called "extraordinary rendition," in which the United States hands suspected terrorists over to authoritarian Muslim regimes. American officials say those regimes are better culturally equipped to elicit information from suspected Islamic militants. But there is little doubt that one of their primary "cultural" tools is torture. As one American official told *The Washington Post*'s Dana Priest and Barton Gellman, who broke the "rendition" story in December 2002, "We don't kick the shit out of them. We send them to other countries so they can kick the shit out of them."

The policy seems to have begun in the 1990s. According to George Tenet, the CIA took part in over 70 renditions before September 11. No one knows how many have occurred since, as Congress is not notified about individual cases. But the practice has probably increased. According to the *Post*, the Clinton administration stopped sending suspected terrorists to Egypt after repeatedly complaining about Cairo's brutal interrogation methods. "You can be sure," said one Bush administration official of such human rights complaints, "that we are not spending a lot of time on that now."

The United States usually hands over lower-level Al Qaeda captives, keeping the key suspects for itself. The most common destinations are Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco, although suspects have also been sent to Syria, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Saudi Arabia. In January 2002, for instance, Indonesian authorities picked up Muhammad Saad Iqbal Madni on CIA intelligence that he assisted shoe-bomber Richard Reid in his plot to blow up an American Airlines flight. Madni was put on a U.S.-registered jet and flown to Egypt. In October 2001, Pakistani authorities picked up Jamil Qasim Saeed Mohammed, a Yemeni linked to the attack on the USS *Cole*. A U.S.-registered plane took him to Jordan. Perhaps the Egyptians and Jordanians promised the United States they would not employ torture, as Syria reportedly did in the Arar case. But it's hard to imagine the United States believed them. After all, the State Department has condemned Jordan for "methods of torture," such as "beatings on the soles of the feet" and "prolonged suspension with ropes in contorted positions." It has noted that "[t]he [Egyptian] security forces continued to mistreat and torture prisoners." And it has accused Damascus of "administering electrical shocks; pulling out fingernails; [and] forcing objects into the rectum." The U.N. Convention Against Torture, which the United States has signed, prohibits sending a suspect to a country "where there are substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture."

In the wake of Abu Ghraib, Americans may find the rendition policy less shocking. It's harder to be outraged by torture in Egypt when we do it ourselves. But, when the United States does the torturing, we can at least investigate the abuses and try, as a democracy, to pass new rules to make sure they do not happen again. When we outsource the torture to our authoritarian allies, there is no such democratic remedy, and thus no way to show that we are fundamentally different from our enemies.

Rendition, ironically, is a form of multilateralism, a kind of dark international cooperation from an administration often criticized for not cooperating enough. But, in this case, the Bushies need to remember the value of democratic unilateralism. As this administration has frequently noted, see-no-evil alliances with tyrannical Arab allies have helped earn the United States the enmity of billions throughout the Muslim world. And yet, by shipping those allies our prisoners, we are associating ourselves even further with the very behavior that breeds such hatred.

Perhaps President Bush really believes the United States will lose the war on terrorism unless it relies on the brutality of friendly Arab governments. But that would be surprising, since he has so clearly said that, unless we divorce ourselves from that brutality, we can't possibly win. **PETER BEINART**

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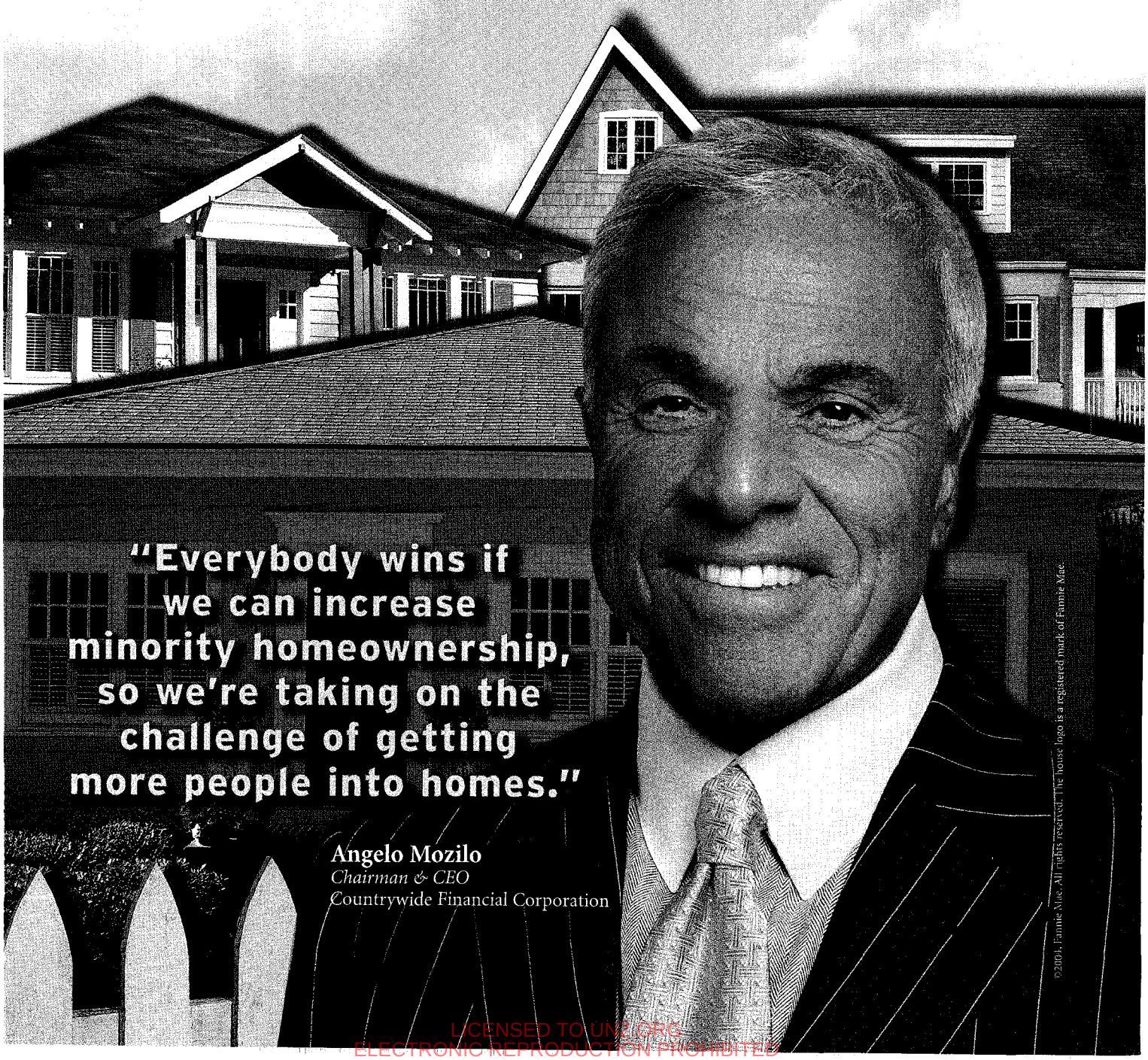
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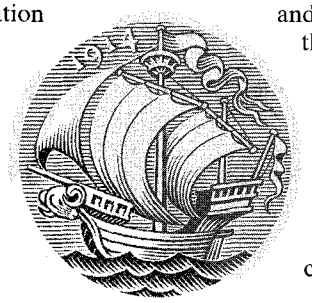
Dissonance

A WAR OF IDEAS is this week a war of images. The abstractions have given way before the concreteness of individual sufferings, which is just as well, since there are no sufferings in the abstract. With the disgusting photographs of the abuse of Iraqi prisoners in the prison at Abu Ghraib, and then the unbearable video, and the even more unbearable audio, of the butchering of Nicholas Berg, the American public is rudely confronted with the one thing that the Bush administration desperately wanted it not to confront. We now have pictures of what this war has become, raw and repugnant pictures. The responses to these pictures will be visceral, and also contradictory: shame at what these Americans have done, rage at what these terrorists have done. The contradiction is a measure of how much is now being asked of the American viscera.

We hasten to add what would, in calmer times, be perfectly obvious: The atrocity in that room was greater by many factors of immorality than the atrocity in that prison. Indeed, the swift succession of images had the effect, or should have had it, of establishing a sense of proportion about the outrages of the day. The American torture in Abu Ghraib was a violation of American principles, but the jihadist slaughter in the anonymous abattoir was a fulfillment of jihadist principles. It really is as simple as that. Or almost as simple: In our reckoning with what Americans did, we must beware the vanity of repentance. It is not true, as our officials now keep reassuring us, that "we" do not do such things. "We" just did such a thing, which is why our authority as the agents of all good things in Iraq has been calamitously damaged. Our pride in the American system of justice should not become a device for dimming our consciousness of American injustice.

If the Bush administration is now desperate in Iraq, it is not only because events have escaped its control, but also because truth has escaped its control. So many of the Bush administration's prospects for success, and not only in Iraq, have been premised on its manipulation of information. The White House's love of secrecy, its disagreeable mixture of paranoia and hauteur, is well-known; but in the case of the Iraq war, the cognitive autocracy of the administration has gone to strange, and immensely insulting, lengths. It has promoted cognitive dissonance into a domestic strategy. It wants the American people to know that a great enterprise is being conducted far away, but it does not want the American people to know very much about that enterprise.



The refusal of the White House to allow cameras at the arrival of the American war dead, so that the American people could actually have a glimpse of the flag-draped coffins on the bleak tarmac, is typical. When Ted Koppel decides to read the names of the war dead, he is denounced as unpatriotic, though a wiser administration would have agreed to bow its head, too, and join the country in honoring the heroism of those named. But this administration, even when it is right, is not wise. Its sense of its own perfection is incompatible with wisdom. And so no acknowledgment of the dark side of the struggle is made, no sacrifices are asked of the society, no alterations in energy policy or fiscal policy are broached in the name of the emergency. There is no emergency, because such a description of reality does not please Karl Rove. We are supposed to live as if the war that we are supposed to support is not taking place. The teaching of the administration is: The future of America hangs in the balance, so go shopping.

This policy of denial breaks new ground in the history of official cynicism in wartime. The old jingoist hysteria was much better, insofar as it was consistent with the proposition that the war really is a matter of the highest importance. Hysteria is at least a way of showing that you care, antiwar hysteria included. But all these awful pictures have now broken the government's grip on what we know and what we feel. Suddenly the war is not only real, it is also vivid. And this means that suddenly the Bush administration is going to have to argue it all over again, or it will lose the support of a sober and concentrated people.

If, that is, the people decide to be sober and concentrated. We are not, after all, the playthings of our government. They may have asked us to go shopping, but we agreed to go shopping. Do the American people really want to know what the Bush administration does not want it to know? Or is the death of "Friends" and "Frasier" all the death that we wish to contemplate? ■

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NOTEBOOK

NORM COLEMAN'S MUZZLING . . . *THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*'S PUZZLING

OIL FUTURES

LISTENING TO DEMOCRATS CRITICIZE the Bush administration over high gas prices can be a little confusing. Back in April, when Bob Woodward's *Plan of Attack* alleged that Prince Bandar, the Saudi ambassador to the United States, promised President Bush that his country would open its spigots to help the president's reelection by juicing the economy, Democrats attacked the president: "If, as Bob Woodward reports, it is true that gas supplies and prices in America are tied to the American election, tied to a secret White House deal, that is outrageous and unacceptable to the people of America," John Kerry charged on April 19. "In effect, Mister Woodward is alleging that you have an understanding with the Saudis that the Saudis will manipulate gasoline prices for your political advantage," House Democratic leaders charged in a letter to Bush.

But, this week, the entire Democratic Party seems to have been mobilized to attack Bush for *not* pressuring the Saudis to reduce gas prices. Terry McAuliffe, the party chairman, led the charge. "George Bush admitted he hasn't bothered to pick up the phone to call the Saudis to stop squeezing the American economy," he complained in a May 18 speech. According to McAuliffe, the problem now is that Bush *won't* cut a deal with Bandar. There's nothing wrong with throwing Bush's words back in his face. As a candidate in 2000, Bush said, "What I think the president ought to do, is he ought to get on the phone with the OPEC cartel and say, 'We expect you to open your spigots!' " But, having already accused Bush of colluding with the Saudis, no matter what Bush does now to try to lower oil prices, Democrats will argue that he and Bandar are springing their secret deal to manipulate the economy. Bush's political future and the strength of the economy are inextricably intertwined this year. Democrats can criticize him for trying to boost both too much or too little, but they can't have it both ways.

Terry McAuliffe

VIETNAM ANALOGY

THIS WEEK, MINNESOTA SENATOR Norm Coleman, a former Democrat who now faithfully carries water for the GOP, attacked Democratic Representative John Murtha of Pennsylvania for declaring that the fight to save Iraq, on its current course, is "unwinnable." "In a world of instantaneous global communication, we need to be very sensitive to what we say. . . . We should be very careful not to encourage our enemies," Coleman explained. "This war is winnable, but if insurgents heard [Murtha's] words, it was harder to win [than] before he spoke."

The charge that critics of U.S. Iraq policy aid the enemy is appalling under any circumstances, but it's downright laughable coming from Coleman. Why? Because Coleman was a Vietnam War protester. In 1997, Coleman's father showed a *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* reporter a 1970 photo of Norm, "disheveled hair down his back and an armband on one of his biceps—hanging a STOP WAR banner from a rooftop during a student strike." Coleman's own website bio proudly explains that he was "deeply involved in the antiwar and civil rights movements." Why is he boasting about it if, by his own logic, his antiwar activism encouraged America's enemies? Who knows? But Coleman certainly won't tolerate such contradictions in others. Earlier this year, he ripped John Kerry's record on defense and intelligence spending: "Where's the clarity? Where's the consistency?" asked the Democrat-turned-Republican and protester-turned-anti-protester. Where indeed?

CAUSE OF CONFUSION

WALL STREET JOURNAL EDITORials are most fun when they take the form of a puzzle—a brainteaser that requires the reader to rearrange convoluted logic. Does it all add up to a coherent argument? You never know. That's the fun of the game. This week's column, "SEE NO EVIL IN SUDAN," was one of the page's classic mind-benders. It begins, "After the genocide in Rwanda a decade ago, the world's moralists said, 'never again.' Well, it's happening again, this time in Sudan, but once more the United Nations, the Arab world and Europeans are failing to speak up, much less act." On its surface, this sentence sounds like a plea to stop the Sudanese regime's genocidal campaign against the tribes in the country's Darfur region. But veteran players will realize that "moralist" is usually a *Journal* term of derision. What, then, is being argued? A bit farther down, the editorialists add this clue: "U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has raised the alarm about Sudan, but once again the 'international community' is proving to be feckless, and the Bush

DAVID COWLES

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administration has been isolated in its attempts to raise international pressure on Khartoum." Here, a familiar theme appears: The failure to act in Sudan, it seems, is another case of European irresponsibility competing with U.S. nobility. Now, if the *Journal* were only to explain what Bush's "attempts" are, we might have a solution to our puzzle and understand the editorial's argument. But it doesn't—perhaps because Bush hasn't made any such attempts. Nor, oddly, does the *Journal* suggest what ought to be attempted. It says only that we should not intervene militarily. But, the confused reader cries, such inaction echoes the failures in Rwanda, and the *Journal* lamented those! Alas, it did not. That was just a red herring cloaked in clever phrasing. In truth, the *Journal* never wanted us to intervene in Rwanda. In fact, when Bill Clinton proposed sending troops to the country in 1996 to deal with the refugee crisis, the *Journal* described it as "intervening fecklessly." And, in 1999, it dismissively noted, "No world war ever started in Rwanda." It's hard to have your cries of "never again" taken seriously when you never even objected the first time.

GENEVA CIRCUMVENTION

"THE UNITED STATES SEEKS TO comply fully with its convention obligations with respect to prisoners of war and security prisoners in Iraq. In recent days, horrific abuses have come to light, but there should be no doubt in anyone's mind that the United States fully recognizes its obligations under the Geneva Conventions."—White House Counsel Alberto Gonzales, in a *Washington Post* letter to the editor, May 8, 2004

"In my judgment, this new paradigm renders obsolete Geneva's strict limitations on questioning of enemy prisoners and renders quaint some of its provisions."—Gonzales, in a memo to Bush, January 25, 2002 ■

TNR.commentary

Campaign Journal

RYAN LIZZA

LEADERSHIP DOWN: The big news in the May 14 CNN/*Time* poll is not that Kerry is beating Bush 51 to 46 percent among likely voters, or that Bush's approval rating is at 46 percent, or that Kerry has opened up huge leads on health care, the environment, the deficit, and jobs. We knew all that.

The big news is that Bush's standing on even his strongest issues is now eroding. On who would handle Iraq better, Bush and Kerry are basically tied (Bush 46, Kerry 43). On the question of who would better handle terrorism—an issue on which Bush has often led by 20 to 30 points—Bush is down to 49 percent and Kerry is up to 42 percent. On "moral values," perhaps one of the last refuges for Bush once national security is gone, it's Bush 46, Kerry 42. Kerry is even leading on the issue of taxes.

But that's not all:

> Those with "doubts and reservations" about Bush's ability to lead the country rose from 55 percent to 59 percent while those who believe the president can be trusted as a leader dropped from 44 percent to 39 percent, since early February.

Iraq, terrorism, moral values, taxes, leadership. Bush's old pillars of strength are crumbling. No wonder last week he aired an education ad featuring Laura Bush, and, on the stump, has returned to compassionate conservatism.

IRAQ'D

SPENCER ACKERMAN

HOW TO CUT AND RUN: On May 14, White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan affirmed recent statements by Secretary of State Colin Powell and Iraqi proconsul L. Paul Bremer that the United States would withdraw from Iraq after June 30 if asked to do so: "We only station our forces in places around the world where we are welcome. . . . If a sovereign Iraqi government did not want us there, we would not be there." He hedged his statement much as Powell and Bremer did: with the wildly optimistic assumption that the United States won't actually be asked to leave. "I fully expect coalition forces to continue to be in Iraq at the invitation of a sovereign government on July 1."

But it's not clear that the Bush administration actually wants to receive that invitation. While the president is talking about seeing the mission through, he is also defining down the conditions for staying the course. Take this statement from his Saturday radio address:

> On June 30, the flag of a free Iraq will be raised, and Iraq's new interim government will assume a sovereign authority. America will keep its commitment to the independence and national dignity of the Iraqi people. Yet the vital mission of our military in helping to provide security will continue on July 1 and beyond.
>
> Coalition forces are training thousands of Iraqis to protect a free Iraq from external aggression and internal subversion. Our forces will remain in Iraq to assist the Iraqi people until Iraqis can secure their own country.

Respecting the "independence and national dignity of the Iraqi people" is an oblique way of confirming what Powell and Bremer said: We'd be respecting their national dignity if we go out the door when they show us to it. But it's actually the second statement—about our forces staying put until trained Iraqi security forces can secure their own country—that looks more and more like an exit ramp, Bush's window dressing about our "vital mission" notwithstanding. As Walter Pincus reports in the May 16 *Washington Post*, the United States is still rushing to throw Iraqis into uniforms, regardless of their level of training (and the poor performance of such troops against insurgents in April). Pincus notes that "54,500 of the proposed 75,000 members of the Iraqi Police Service on a U.S. government payroll remain untrained." Meanwhile, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld is still throwing out grossly unrealistic numbers:

> Rumsfeld this week told a Pentagon town hall meeting that about 206,000 Iraqis have been recruited to provide security, "and we are heading to 265,000." The report [sent to Congress last month by the Coalition Provisional Authority], however, noted that as of mid-March, little more than half of those cited by Rumsfeld were on duty and fully qualified. And more than half of those, 74,000, . . . [guard] Iraqi ministry buildings.

Powell and Bremer have given Bush their version of an exit ramp—respecting the wishes of a sovereign Iraqi government to rid their country of a foreign occupation. Rumsfeld is giving Bush another. With his reelection slipping away, does Bush really intend to drive a steady course forward?

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Islamabad Dispatch

Fatal Flaw

BY MASSOUD ANSARI

SINCE THE MURDER of Daniel Pearl some two years ago, the Pakistani government has vowed to do everything possible to find the journalist's assassins. Shortly after the killing, *The New York Times* reported that Pakistani leader Pervez Musharraf appeared on national television and said that the murder had "doubled his resolve" to find those responsible and to root out Islamic militancy in Pakistan.

Unfortunately, Islamabad may not be trying that hard. Pakistani police sources say that, because of government pressure, several leading suspects in Pearl's gruesome death have not been charged. It seems the government is preventing the prosecution of these men because it fears their stories will reveal how badly Pakistan bungled the original Pearl investigation.

THIS GROUP OF roughly a dozen suspects, which includes veteran militants Fazal Karim, Qari Asad, and Imtiaz Siddiqui, fell into government hands in recent months after the men were arrested for drug-trafficking and other crimes unrelated to Pearl's death. After interrogating them, Pakistani police quickly suspected the men had links to the Pearl abduction and killing. Several of the men apparently knew intimate details of Pearl's kidnapping—that he was not forcibly abducted from a restaurant but at first went willingly with militants in his car, hoping for an interview with a jihadi leader named Mubarak Shah Gillani; how he was given English reading material during his captivity; how he made at least one escape attempt, trying to flee three days before he died. "He tried to scale the wall but couldn't because both his hands were tied, and soon he was rolled back and chained," one of the militants told police.

But the suspects also told interrogators stories that Islamabad might not want the public—and the United States—to hear. Police sources say senior government officials are petrified that, if these militants are charged, they will reveal details showing that the earlier case made by the government against Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, whom Islamabad fingered as the ringleader of Pearl's killers, was somewhat spurious. After catching Sheikh in February 2002, the government alleged that he had masterminded the killing, sentenced him to hang, and essentially announced the Pearl case closed. Earlier this year, *The New York Times* reported, Abdur Rauf Chaudhry, a spokesman for the Pakistani government, insisted that Sheikh had plotted the killing.

In jailing Sheikh, Musharraf's government forestalled pressure from Washington, which wanted the Pakistani authorities to cooperate with American intelligence and law enforcement in looking for everyone involved in the Pearl killing. "The government came out with this [Sheikh] theory and quickly took it too far, to ease international pressure," says one police source. By bringing Sheikh to trial, police sources say, the Pakistani government prevented the United States from looking more closely into Pearl's killers and their links to Islamist groups long active in Pakistan—and historically abetted by the country's notorious intelligence services. After all, before the Pearl killing, Sheikh was linked to several militant organizations that fought in Indian-held Kashmir, a struggle backed for years by Pakistani intelligence.

Yet Pakistani police now know, from their recent arrests, that Sheikh was only involved in conspiring to kidnap Pearl, that he may not have been present at the time Pearl was kidnapped, and that he likely did not give the order to murder the American journalist. Police sources say that, under interrogation, Sheikh told the authorities he had only handled the Pearl kidnapping but did not participate in the actual abduction or Pearl's murder. Sheikh's testimony has now been corroborated by the independent accounts of several of the men in custody. "Conspiring to kidnap is a heinous crime under Pakistani law and is punishable [with] life imprisonment," but it's not what Sheikh was charged with, says one Pakistani legal expert familiar with the case. In fact, the police now believe that Sheikh and several associates planned to release Pearl after receiving the ransom payment but that a group of Arabs linked to Al Qaeda member Khalid Shaikh Mohammed came to the hideout, took charge of the situation, and ultimately murdered the journalist.

If the government now allows this group of suspects to testify, their stories of how the Arabs masterminded the killing would likely exonerate Sheikh of the actual murder and would show that, once Sheikh was arrested, the Pakistani police stopped looking for other suspects and stumbled on this recent group almost by accident. In fact, in prosecuting Sheikh, the Pakistani government may have made up, or coaxed, evidence linking Sheikh to the killing. To prove that Sheikh was linked to the murder, for instance, the government introduced testimony from a cab driver who, on the night of the kidnapping, supposedly saw Sheikh taking Pearl away in a car; but it was a dark, January evening, and the driver was unlikely to have seen anything.

TO PROTECT THE government, some of these suspected killers are being set free. One man "was released because we could only implicate him in a case of possessing illegal weapons and other minor charges," says a police official privy to the investigations. Others have been charged with crimes like narcotics-smuggling or sectarian violence, in order to put them in prison without delving into the Pearl case. Police sources say that none will ever be charged for their role in Pearl's death. ■

Massoud Ansari is a frequent TNR *contributor based in Pakistan.*

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Tel Aviv Dispatch

Lonely Crowd

BY MARTIN PERETZ

TEL AVIV'S RABIN SQUARE is an iconic site. It is where, after an exuberant peace rally in 1995, the prime minister was murdered and where, on perhaps a dozen occasions since, Israelis have gathered to rekindle the dewy sentiments about relations with the Palestinians that he so awkwardly—and so late in life—appeared to embody. But, by now, almost everyone understands that his faith in a viable Palestinian negotiating partner was, to say the least, naïve. And no one at last Saturday night's rally so much as mentioned Yitzhak Rabin's name. Instead, there was plenty of *schwarmerei* folk music, beginning with "We Shall Overcome." Another era, another language, another issue, another country. Rather pathetic at a time when, among the young, in hot clubs and cafés everywhere, there is a revival of old romantic and confident Zionist songs. They are not, to be sure, doing wild circle dances. But they are reinventing the *kumsitz* with a nostalgic repertoire—indicating, I believe, that post-Zionism has come and gone, *pace* Tony Judt. Good riddance.

It was a large crowd, perhaps 150,000 people, but a generally listless one. Perhaps it was the lingering pall of the 13 dead soldiers in Gaza over the previous week, some of whose body parts, including an intact brain, were displayed on television by Palestine's holy warriors. But mostly, I think, the pall reflected the crowd's recognition that they were not the majority some of their tribunes told them they were. "Get out of Gaza, Start Talking" was their slogan. The slogan, however, papered over important differences among the varied constituencies, and so it is not a political program at all. It's rather like "Peace Now," the slogan that has named a loose touchy-feely movement in Israel for years, or the Vietnam War–era incantation "Give Peace a Chance." Just words, and meaningless ones, at that.

To be sure, the evidence suggests that a vast preponderance of Israelis want to remove the settlements from Gaza (as I have long believed should be done) and even believe they were a tragic mistake (not only Ariel Sharon's mistake and Menachem Begin's, but also Rabin's and Shimon Peres's). Two military heroes—my friend Ami Ayalon, former head of both the navy and the Shin Bet internal security apparatus, who is leading his own peace initiative with the Palestinian moderate Sari Nusseibeh, and Yom Tov Samia, a tough ex-commander in Gaza—told the rally that it was, in effect, gathering to support Sharon's disengagement plan, and, had he not proposed it, they would not have gathered at all.

Were that all the marchers wanted, they might indeed represent the Israeli center. But I suspect a vast preponderance of the demonstrators would remove not only the settlers, but also the army from Gaza's land borders, seacoast, and skies, leaving the territory open to the importation of truly heavy weaponry. (It was in the course of destroying the funnel-tunnels through which such weapons are smuggled that the 13 Israeli soldiers were killed.) And there is no majority at all for this kind of suicidal retreat. It is true that the settlers have been holding several generations of young Israeli men hostage to their fanatical caprice. But the Gaza conflict is not at all defined by the 21 sparsely populated Jewish settlements, amounting to 7,500 souls, mostly children. Rather, it is defined, as Hamas and Islamic Jihad and the other thug militias never tire of insisting, by the very existence of Israel.

Egypt's peace treaty with Israel has been very lucrative for the Mubarak regime, thanks to America's multibillion annual subvention, but it has not disposed Cairo to police its sovereign territory against the fatal, now-routine contraband. This vast armaments pipeline into Gaza is Hosni Mubarak's payoff to his restless street. Without Israel's military presence, he'd be without an excuse to intervene against this contraband at all. There's a precedent for this. In 1970, in violation of an agreement with Israel brokered by Henry Kissinger, Egypt moved SAM-3 missiles up to the Suez Canal, where they provided Mubarak's predecessor, Anwar Sadat, with the cover to launch the Yom Kippur War three years later. No responsible government in Jerusalem can permit the entry into Gaza of artillery and missiles (and tanks, for that matter) that could target Tel Aviv.

A FEW DAYS before the demonstration, I spoke with Ehud Barak, who wagered a lot in 2000—with Bill Clinton's cajoling reassurances—on Yasir Arafat's reasonableness. Daring, logical (perhaps to a fault), and Labor's only plausible winning standard-bearer, Barak has supported Sharon's actions in Gaza. Where he is critical of Sharon, in fact, it is mostly from the right—because construction of Israel's security fence in the West Bank is proceeding too slowly. On Gaza, Barak worries that Sharon's disengagement plan does not grapple sufficiently with what comes next. Israel will still have to provide Gaza with electricity and gas, something it has done, uninterrupted, almost forever. And Gaza, after all, is among the most densely populated places on earth. After more than half a century of international benevolence, for which the Gazans effectively gave up the option of resettlement, the area provides few economic and social opportunities to its inhabitants. During Egyptian rule, from 1949 to 1967, Gaza was sealed: No one in, no one out. Today, none of the rich Arab countries will let Gazans in. Sharon is considering a proposal to ask Egypt to allow Gaza to expand westward into the Sinai desert. In return, it would get land in Israel's Negev. There are preliminary explorations between Jerusalem and Cairo on this suggestion. Let's see how far that goes.

But who will govern Gaza? Ahmed Yassin's heirs? One thing you can be certain of: Neither the United Nations nor

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the European Union, both of which have declaimed so much about the occupation, will risk a soldier or administrator in the Falluja of Palestine. There's vague talk about a mandatory arrangement. But Great Britain did that duty here for 25 years in the first half of the last century, and it left in disarray, pulling down the Union Jack to the strains of "God Save the King," with the high commissioner saluting smartly as his ship pulled out of Haifa harbor. No one, I assume, is proposing that the United States step into the vacuum.

Which brings us to the question of whether Israel really has, among the Palestinians, a true partner for peace. "Yes," proclaimed some of the posters. "Yes, yes," assured Peres, who spoke, yet again, of "the new Middle East" of his imagination. But who is this partner, whose first task must be to confront the terrorists and, as Rabin once put it, "break [their] arms"? Certainly not the nameless man who succeeded Abdel Aziz Rantisi as head of Hamas. Where is the groundswell of Palestinian public sentiment for accommodation with the Jews? Yes, there are Professor Sari Nusseibeh and his friends—people who are both brave and afraid—who have signed Ayalon's open letter. But where are the 150,000—or even 1,500—ordinary Palestinians who want "Peace Now"? Have you ever seen them interviewed on television? Why do the Palestinians rush to the streets only to demand blood?

If pushed, Peres would probably admit that the leadership he imagines for Gaza is that old default: Arafat. After all, Arafat holds, with the martyred Rabin and with Peres himself, the Nobel Peace Prize, by now a badge of shame. Will Arafat finally lead his people toward peace? Speaking on Palestinian radio on the very day the Israelis rallied, Arafat said, "If they want peace, then let's have peace." He also added, quoting from the Koran, "Find what strength you have to terrorize your enemy and the enemy of God." Sacred words, sacred work. And so the protesters in Rabin Square, yet again, received their answer. ■

Why gay marriage isn't *Roe*.

Apocalypse Not

BY E.J. GRAFF

AFTER MAY 17, as Massachusetts began marrying same-sex couples, some preachers predicted the end of civilization and general apocalypse. Pundits, those secular preachers, blithely predicted a different kind of apocalypse: an ever more intractable culture war. Conventional wisdom on *Goodridge* v. *Department of Public Health*, the decision that opened the way for same-sex marriages in the state, goes something like this: As a nation, we are in the midst of a culture war over social issues like abortion, prayer in schools, stem-cell research, and same-sex marriage. In this view, when judges short-circuit the political process, it's worse than foolish: It's harmful. The cultural divide deepens, leaving both sides paralyzed in their anger, doomed forever to shout at each other from battling newspaper columns and bumper stickers.

Roe v. *Wade* is trotted out as Exhibit A for this idea. Soon after the Massachusetts decision last year, columnist George Will argued, "After courts put abortion policy—as they may yet put marriage law—largely beyond political debate in the states, bitterness became constant." More recently, columnist and TNR contributing editor Charles Krauthammer wrote, "We are the only Western country to have legalized abortion by judicial fiat rather than by democratic approval of the people or the legislature. Are we going to do it again with gay marriage?" It's not just conservatives who take this view. In March, Paul Starr made a similar argument in the liberal *American Prospect*, writing that the Massachusetts decision "illustrate[d] the risks of turning to the courts to leapfrog public opinion in a democracy."

But the analogy with *Roe* is just plain wrong. Before *Roe*, abortion rights supporters could trigger waves of emotion by waving coat hangers, thus evoking painful memories of women dead or maimed in botched back-alley abortions. With abortion legal for more than 30 years, those bloody memories are now gone, making pro-choice arguments sound like abstractions. No abortion rights supporter, of course, laments the fact that American women no longer die from illegal abortions, but it does make the pro-choice side a bit more difficult to illustrate on television, where so much national policy discussion is shaped. Instead, the pro-life side now has the better visuals, encouraging us all to debate the inner lives of quivering ultrasound images. National opinion has remained basically deadlocked for 30 years: About 25 percent think abortion should always be legal, about 55 percent believe it should sometimes be legal, and a little less than 20 percent think it should always be banned. But the pro-choice side's handicap in the image war can be seen everywhere, from President Bush's signature last month on the Unborn Victims of Violence Act, a.k.a. Laci and Conner's law, which makes it a separate federal crime to harm a fetus while committing a crime against a pregnant woman (and thus suggests that a fetus is a person) to a November 2003 Gallup poll showing that a full 32 percent of teenagers—nearly twice the percentage of adults—believe all abortions should be against the law.

But *Goodridge* will have the opposite effect on public opinion: Unlike *Roe*, it will give the progressive side *more* visual aids, not fewer. Until *Roe*, the abortion debate was

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about real damage to real women's lives; afterward, it was about the moral abstraction of whether fetuses are people. Until *Goodridge*, the same-sex marriage debate was entirely about abstractions; now it will be about real couples' sorrows and joys. The conservative argument that "marriage has always been this way" (except in Canada, the Netherlands, and Belgium, which have had same-sex marriages for between one and three years) was an effective argument for caution. But, once those two nice girls down the street get their marriage license and the earth doesn't rumble, opponents will have to play on very different political terrain. From now on, what we talk about when we talk about same-sex marriage will be real live co-workers, cousins, and friends. The debate will no longer be about abstract cultural values; it will be about *people*. Newlyweds make great B-roll footage, as we saw this winter in San Francisco. Once same-sex marriage has a human face, its opponents will start to seem really cranky—and really, really mean. Who wants to be the wedding's evil fairy godmother, throwing rancor instead of rice? No one, apparently: Even the notorious Fred "God Hates Fags" Phelps—the Kansas Baptist minister whose cadre picketed Matthew Shepard's funeral, and, at 12:01 a.m. Monday, picketed Cambridge City Hall as it issued the state's first same-sex marriage licenses—failed to show up with the national media at Hillary and Julie Goodridge's publicly announced (and protest-free) wedding that afternoon.

THERE'S ANOTHER IMPORTANT way *Goodridge* is unlike *Roe*: It's a state, not a federal, court decision. Critics of *Roe*—among them TNR's Jeffrey Rosen—say the decision cut short a national political debate on abortion. But *Goodridge* didn't stop a national debate; it jumpstarted one, in large part because the states have a bitter history of refusing to recognize each others' marriage and divorce laws when they don't feel like it. That's about to happen again with Massachusetts's same-sex marriages—and this fight will be very ugly for particular couples. Say a pair of Boston newlyweds goes to Georgia to visit the in-laws. One of the women drops dead from a heart attack. The county coroner refuses to let her wedded spouse ship the body home to Boston, insisting that, under Georgia law, the two were not legal kin. Such outrages already happen to lesbian and gay couples, but now, because it's about marriage—a certified political issue—the story will hit the national news. Which side do you think most people will take: the coldhearted state's or the weeping widow's?

Goodridge, in short, is the opposite of *Roe*: local and particular instead of national and abstract. And so it will remain for some time—perhaps years. The Supreme Court has no authority to overturn *Goodridge*. Many commentators imagine that federal courts will immediately take up the question of whether the federal Defense of Marriage Act is constitutional or whether other states must recognize Massachusetts's marriages. No state demands that its residents register their current marital status if they happened to marry out of state, which means that, until there's a specific challenge to the law, no court will take up the question of whether or not a couple is married. The most likely disputes will be over questions of child custody, financial credit, death, disaster, divorce, Social Security, or taxes. In other words, before same-sex marriage hits the courts, something bad has to happen, such as the IRS sending back some couple's jointly filed April 2005 tax returns or Kansas refusing to pass on a dead man's farm to his widower. Those cases will take awhile to work their way up. And, even once they're appealed to the very top, it's not clear that the Supreme Court will agree to hear them—at least in the immediate future. After all, justices have been traditionally reluctant to take cases about harmonizing state marriage laws.

Meanwhile, as more time goes by, public opinion will keep shifting in a libertarian direction. Opinion on lesbian and gay issues has moved far more rapidly than on other cultural questions. In 2000, 61 percent of Californians voted to ban same-sex marriages. This past August, according to that state's Field Poll, only 50 percent of the electorate said they "disapprove" of full marriage rights for same-sex couples. Around the country, the younger the demographic slice, the stronger the support for same-sex marriage. Even the student newspaper of Baylor University, the largest Baptist school in the world, has editorialized in favor of same-sex marriage. In fact, on May 16, *The New York Times* reported that religious conservatives are concerned that their parishioners aren't hitting the streets in outrage over the issue. The Reverend Louis P. Sheldon, chair of the Traditional Values Coalition, said, "I don't see any traction. The calls aren't coming in, and I am not sure why."

National polls also show a shift away from disapproval and toward acceptance of lesbian and gay pairs. Between 1996 and 2004, for instance, Gallup found a 6 percent increase in respondents favoring legal marriage rights for same-sex couples. Perhaps more significantly, in July 2003, Gallup found that one-third of those polled said that, in the past few years—the "Will & Grace" and "Queer Eye" years—they had become "more accepting" of lesbians and gay men.

And there has been no sign that this trend will reverse itself. Disapproving of same-sex marriage may eventually become like disapproving of Larry King's many marriages: You might think it ridiculous or even disgusting, but it would seem gratuitously nasty to amend our Constitution just to stop it.

The *Goodridge* aftermath, in short, will resemble not *Roe*'s aftermath, but rather the aftermath of other state-by-state marriage changes over the twentieth century, such as the elimination of bans on interracial marriage, contraception, and divorce. For a few years, maybe even a decade, the issue will roil state legislatures. Then it will recede into memory. Politicians and pundits who have staked their reputations on cultural apocalypse may be disappointed to find that, as Massachusetts gender-neutralizes marriage's entrance requirements, the American response is not a bang, or even a whimper, but a yawn. ■

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Why Russians want democracy.

Velvet Glove

BY MASHA GESSEN

On December 7, 2003, Russians voted their two liberal-democratic parties out of parliament and handed a two-thirds majority in the lower house, the Duma, to the leading pro-presidential party. On March 14, Russians reelected President Vladimir Putin, giving him 71 percent of the vote. Nine days later, a 23-year-old Russian blogger posted a photo of a very homely young woman on his website, accompanied by the following appeal:

> Vote for Alyona Pisklova! Alas, our candidate, Fuck the Election/Against All Candidates, failed in the presidential and the parliamentary election. But this time our candidate has to win! May the force be with us! We will overturn everyone's concept of beauty! Say NO to corporate politics! Vote [hyperlink] here. Distribute this campaign poster in your [Web logs], send it out by mail and [instant messenger], transfer it via closed satellite channels and by word of mouth, write text messages, use Morse Code to type out the website address. This is the final frontier.

Sixteen hours later, the very unattractive Alyona Pisklova had taken first place in an online Miss Universe contest conducted by the leading Russian Internet search engine. A blogging community devoted to the campaign had sprung up, as had an official pageant website, *www.stopbarbie.org.ru*. By the time the campaign was over, a couple of weeks later, more than 30,000 people had voted for Pisklova, hundreds of anti-Barbie T-shirts had been sold, and Pisklova had won a preliminary round of the beauty contest. "We managed to stage a small romantic revolution," said the organizer, who calls himself Degri.

The media couldn't get enough of the story. Six weeks after the campaign began, even *The New York Times* weighed in, with an editorial noting that Russians "have begun to sift more carefully through the Western invasions to pick out what they want, while discarding what they don't"—i.e., vapid beauty contests.

The conclusion was absurd. The people who ran the Pisklova campaign were the same young, affluent Russians who keep merchandise flying out of Moscow's overpriced Prada boutiques. Their protest was directed not at the West but, says Degri, at "the general political apathy, the lack of choice." The target, in other words, was Russia's plastic president. It showed that, in a country where the tools of institutional democracy have been hijacked, and where the population is said to abhor the concept of democracy, Russians are actually committed to political freedoms, and a new generation of voters is looking for a creative means of protest.

Masha Gessen, a frequent TNR *contributor, is a journalist based in Moscow.*

The idea that Russians prefer authoritarianism has gained new currency in the wake of the recent one-sided parliamentary and presidential elections. This thesis is most clearly developed in a recent *Foreign Affairs* essay by the eminent Russia historian Richard Pipes, who argues that Putinism is a function of Russians' eternal love for the iron fist. This theory has a way of short-circuiting any conversation about Russia. Why lament Russia's slide into authoritarianism if it's what Russians want? Why lobby the U.S. government to pressure Putin to give his people rights they would reject? And, most insidiously, why impose our Western ideas of democracy on a country that so clearly resists them? I myself have received at least a dozen letters from well-meaning TNR readers suggesting I stop harping on the dangers to democracy in Russia because Russians themselves don't care.

This line of reasoning ignores the fact that Russia produced three of the great anti-authoritarian uprisings of the twentieth century: the mass riots of 1905, the February 1917 overthrow of the czar, and the August 1991 resistance to a hard-line Communist coup. Worse, it ignores considerable contemporary poll data. In fact, a careful reading of the current mood in Russia suggests a different picture: that of a nation that has quickly absorbed key democratic values but whose democratic institutions are so weak that they may not withstand the backlash against democracy's early problems.

Russians chose democracy almost 13 years ago in a stark decision. When a group of apparatchiks seized power in August 1991, placing Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev under house arrest, Russians had two alternatives. They could have accepted the coup, which promised to restore order to a country shaken by five years of glasnost and perestroika. Or they could have resisted and been ruled by Boris Yeltsin, the newly elected president of the Russian republic (then still part of the USSR), who promised to institute democracy and market reforms. Hundreds of thousands of people poured into the streets to support Yeltsin. The Communist hard-liners were forced out of office in three days. Four months later, the Soviet Union was no more.

This was roughly when democracy's triumphant march ended and a difficult transition to a freer Russia began. The year Russians put their faith in Yeltsin and his reforms, 1991, was the hungriest year most Russians remember. A random visit to a food store at that time yielded a few clumps of dirt with tiny carrots inside and perhaps a three-liter glass jar of plum compote. Democracy seemed to promise food. Virtually as soon as the state lifted price controls on January 1, 1992, a flood of imported food items poured in, filling store shelves—but many Russians couldn't afford them. As the ruble plummeted, many people found

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themselves suddenly poor. Just a few months before, everyone who wasn't part of the party elite had enjoyed roughly the same standard of living. Now, some were getting rich overnight. This raised people's expectations, making the rapidly growing gap between rich and poor an even more bitter disappointment.

The economists who devised Russia's reforms badly mishandled people's expectations. These young men, from academic backgrounds, were pompous, condescending, and unwilling to take responsibility for the effects of their policies; their actions tarred the word "democracy" for many Russians. Russia's first reformer prime minister, Yegor Gaidar, gave incomprehensible speeches on economic theory and refused to respond to criticism. When life grew intolerable for the most vulnerable Russians, the reformers did nothing to aid them, refusing even to ensure that state employees received paychecks. Instead, the reformers made unrealistic promises—like in 1992, when Anatoly Chubais, the mastermind of Russian privatization, essentially promised every Russian two luxury cars within a few years. At the same time, a new class of con men made similarly crazy claims about payoffs from proliferating pyramid schemes. The cars promised by Chubais never materialized, and the money pyramids collapsed. The pyramid-builders got rich, as did the reformers and their friends. An ordinary Russian could be forgiven for not seeing differences among the many men who fooled him in the early '90s.

The political transition was not much smoother: The new government cheated, threatened, and, at one point, shelled the opposition. But democratic institutions did emerge. By the end of 1993, Russia had a new constitution, a popularly elected two-chamber parliament, and ambitious plans for judicial reform. A new political elite was taking shape as fast as the new wealthy economic one. The elite was as imperfect as the reforms that begot it: Its members often had ties to the old Communists, the new crime bosses, or both. Still, its very existence underscored the significance of the new democratic institutions. "The contemporary Russian parliament, unlike the Soviet one, is not ritual in nature," says Moscow sociologist and pollster Alexei Levinson. "No one ever bothered buying seats in the old Supreme Soviet or killing its members."

Gradually, lobbying mechanisms took shape and expanded beyond guns and wads of cash. A new class of professionals began to appear: lawyers, consultants, and human rights activists who make their livings serving as bridges between interest groups and the state. A vibrant media seemed to appear almost overnight.

But, just when Russia's precarious political and economic situation finally seemed to stabilize in 1997–1998, the government defaulted on its debt, throwing the currency into another tailspin and impoverishing many citizens overnight—again. By August 1998, even those who had held fast through the rocky early '90s felt duped. Faith in formal business relationships took a huge blow as banks froze deposits and employers withheld salaries. The fact that the average Russian's standard of living had actually improved since 1991 now seemed irrelevant. This time, the new Russian middle class, including many in the media, was affected financially and emotionally, spelling trouble for the government. The opposition-dominated parliament refused to confirm President Yeltsin's candidate for prime minister. A desperate Yeltsin finally calmed the situation by appointing Yevgeny Primakov, a dusted-off member of the old Soviet bureaucracy, as prime minister. Everything about the man, from his economic views to his slurred speech and enormous eyebrows, harkened back to the Brezhnev era. Russia's Restoration had begun.

Over the following year, some leaders of the Russian political elite devised a stabilization plan. It involved consolidating power—an altogether reasonable proposition in a teetering country. It also involved replacing the ailing Yeltsin with a handpicked successor, Putin. Finally, it involved the old Soviet technique of disavowing and discrediting the preceding regime, as Nikita Khrushchev had done with Josef Stalin, Leonid Brezhnev had done with Khrushchev, and Gorbachev had done with the geezers that preceded him. The problem was that, this time, the regime to be undermined was not so much Yeltsin's government, but democracy itself, the promise of which Yeltsin had once symbolized. A plan for smearing democracy was hatched. "The word *democracy* itself fell victim to a p.r. attack," says Svetlana Boym, a Slavic languages and literatures professor at Harvard University who has studied public relations in Russia. She says a group of intellectuals working for the Putin campaign labored to spread new derogatory terms, such as *dermokratiya* ("crapocracy") and *demshiza* ("demoschizoids," referring to the foot soldiers of the early '90s pro-democracy movement). "So, not only was the concept of democracy discredited in the late 1990s," she maintains, "but it was discredited by design."

Indeed, in 1999, some polls showed that more than half of Russians said that multiparty elections do more harm than good. These are the polls on which Pipes relies to make his point that Russians don't want democratic rule.

RUSSIANS SEEMED TO be longing for a return to authoritarian rule, and they got it. Since becoming president four and a half years ago, Putin has reversed many of the democratic gains. He has cracked down on the media; used a constitutional loophole to turn the upper house of parliament into an appointed body; moved to limit the power of Russia's 89 locally elected governors; and effectively seized control of the courts. And yet, in his second inaugural speech on May 7, Putin talked of the need for multiparty elections and declared, "Only free people in a free country can be successful." Though Putin managed to avoid the discredited term "democracy," he essentially devoted his speech to affirming democratic values. Was he doing it to appease the West? That's unlikely: Western powers, especially the United States, have been very tolerant of Putin's policies and would

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have been satisfied with a self-congratulatory speech on the economy. Was it an Orwellian exercise in reversing the meaning of words? Almost certainly, but the question remains: Why did Putin choose to appropriate these particular concepts? Because, strangely enough, the basic concepts of democracy are integral to Putin's support.

A variety of opinion polls show that democratic values rank very high on Russians' lists of priorities. In August of 2003, the Public Opinion Foundation, a Moscow think tank, asked Russians to choose five of the most important values from a list of 24. "Human rights," chosen by 34 percent, ranked in the top five along with "family," "security," "financial security," and "peace." Such concepts as "order" and "stability" did not make it into the top five. In October 2002, the same organization polled Russians on their attitudes toward elections. Only 14 percent said they considered elections superfluous, while 73 percent said they were absolutely necessary. A majority of Russians say that Russia should strive to join the European Union. One of the three leading reasons respondents gave is that EU membership would compel Russia to strengthen its democracy. Russians have watched their Eastern European neighbors join the EU, and they are keenly aware of the demand that new members comply with standards of democratic governance.

The percentage of Russians who think "it would be better if things had just stayed as they were before perestroika" fell from 55 to 46 percent over the past two years, while those who strongly disagree with this statement grew from 38 to 44 percent. These numbers, as well as the growing support for elections, suggest that some of what looked like anti-democratic sentiment in the late '90s was a function of the respondents' personal desperation following Russia's financial crash. As the economy stabilizes, a significant number of Russians seem to be reclaiming the democratic ideals of the early '90s—a remarkable phenomenon considering that the state, and the media it controls, are essentially promoting the opposite message.

Russians' support for democratic values remains strong even as the actual word "democracy" elicits an allergic reaction (though it is weakening with time). "I can still design a poll in which I get nine times as many anti-democracy statements as pro-democracy ones," says Levinson. "The bitterness suffered after the first three or four years of Gorbachev's and Yeltsin's reforms has stretched to affect an entire generation. But the statement boils down to, 'We have been duped in the name of democracy, even though democracy is probably the right thing.' "

The only specific area in which Russians express a consistently anti-democratic view is the media. Poll after poll shows that more than half of Russians favor censorship. But sociologists offer an explanation: When people talk about censorship, they don't really mean censorship. "Invariably, if you ask people whether the media should be free, they say yes," explains Levinson. "And, if you ask them if access to information should be unimpeded, they also say yes. But, then, if you ask whether there shouldn't be a government body that will track violence and sex on television, they also say yes. So what they actually mean is a sort of vice squad for the media."

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If Russians like democracy so much, why don't they vote for pro-democracy politicians? One obvious reason is the way the Kremlin has rigged election campaigns, denying pro-democracy parties access to the broadcast media. But another, according to Levinson, is that pro-democracy parties have little to offer a public that has already bought into democratic values. Neither of Russia's pro-democracy parties have much of a platform, aside from affirming democracy itself. In fact, the people who, judging from the polls, consistently vote against Putin and pro-Putin parties are the die-hard Communists. The secret, it seems, is Putin's balancing act: As long as he manages to pay lip service to democratic values while keeping the actual democrats from forming an opposition force, he will continue to enjoy the support of Russia's increasingly pro-democracy public—even as he eviscerates Russia's democratic gains. This is not because Russians are crazy or hypocritical; it is because the state is far stronger than any institutions of civil society. And the imbalance is only increasing, in part because the state is steadily undermining civil society.

Future Russian elections seem set to resemble the online beauty contest: A choice between plastic, counterfeit beauties and not voting at all. Unfortunately, the likelihood that some 23-year-old will rouse the masses by launching a movement against Putin seems low. Even while Putin—and the rest of the country—is talking about freedom and democracy, a familiar fear of the state is setting in. You can see it in the way people respond with terror to Kremlin directives. You can also see it in the opinion polls, where over 70 percent of people claim to approve of Putin, but only 20 to 50 percent approve of his actions in any one area. You see it in the rate of refusals to participate in the opinion polls, which has risen by about 20 percent in four years.

But this fear is just part of a larger danger facing all Russian democratic institutions. The last four years have shown just how weak these are: The president has been able to transform the entire parliament, annihilate the independent broadcasters, and consolidate virtually all federal power in his own hands. If it weren't for Russians' basic acceptance of elections and other core democratic values, the damage probably would have been far greater. More damage is still likely. And, if foreign observers respond to the ongoing destruction of Russia's democratic institutions by reassuring themselves that Russians didn't want democracy in the first place, they will be betraying the Russian people's valiant, if unsuccessful, years-long struggle finally to live in a democracy. ■

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Barack Obama's miraculous campaign.

Race Against History

BY NOAM SCHEIBER

JOLIET, ILLINOIS

"SLOPPY DRUNK" IS not a term that warms the hearts of advance men, the people responsible for making politicians' events run smoothly. It is, however, a fairly apt description of at least a quarter of the audience at the Will/Grundy County Annual AFL-CIO Dinner on this Friday night in late April, just before State Senator Barack Obama arrives to make a pitch for his U.S. Senate campaign. At 9:00 p.m., a couple hundred union members are gathered in a banquet hall whose hard linoleum floor, institutional ceiling tiles, and decorative band of Christmas lights give it the feel of a high school cafeteria. Joliet is only about 45 minutes from downtown Chicago, at the center of Will, one of the suburban "collar" counties that surround the city. But, culturally, it feels much farther away. The women's hairdos are noticeably bigger, the men a little heavier. Everyone appears to be drinking beer and cocktails from clear plastic cups. And, as I walk in, an emcee reminds the audience not to forget about tonight's "50-50 raffle," in the working-class Illinoisan accent "Saturday Night Live" made famous.

Another thing not likely to warm the hearts of advance men: watching the warm-up act for your boss rant about the infernal treachery of politicians. George W. Bush carried Will County by a few percentage points in 2000; in 2002, Republicans swept just about every local office here. But you'd never know it listening to Margaret Blackshere, the diminutive president of the state AFL-CIO, who gives the speech directly before Obama's. Blackshere carries on for what must be 15 minutes about corporate greed, the exploitation of workers in Beijing, and the uselessness of the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration. And, while her message seems to resonate with the audience—a group of ironworkers assures me that everyone here is concerned about the migration of jobs overseas—her tone is a little jarring. The speech's crescendo is a surprisingly militant indictment of not only the president ("I'll be damned if I'm going to let George W. Bush and his cronies destroy us"), but of any politician who would "wrap themselves in our flag." "Thank you very much, Margaret, we have our work cut out for us," is the only thing the slightly stunned emcee can think to say once she finishes.

When Obama is finally introduced, he's at no such loss. A self-described "skinny guy from the South Side" with a mild country drawl, his broad smile and high cheekbones make him an impressive figure on stage. Obama frames his speech as a playful introduction to himself. ("When I first ran for state Senate ... [people] would call me 'Yo Mama.' And I'd have to explain, 'No, it's O-bama'—that my father was from Kenya, from Africa, which is where I got the name ... and that my mother was from Kansas, which is why I talk the way I do.") But, more than that, his speech is a call for uplift so earnest it would make John Edwards blush. "People would ask me, 'You seem like a nice guy, you're a church-going man, got a wonderful law degree, great future ahead of you, why in the heck would you want to go into something dirty and nasty like politics?' But I tell people the reason I got into politics is the same reason that people decided to form unions," Obama says. "And that is that we are all connected as one people. ... If there's a child on the South Side of Chicago that can't read, that makes a difference in my life, even if it's not my child."

And it works! This crowd of nearly drunken local union heavies—which, ten minutes earlier, had been incited to rip the limbs off the first politician it could find—is visibly moved.

It's an even more impressive feat given that white, blue-collar voters have never been particularly hospitable to African American candidates. Indeed, over the last 40 years, despite the advances of the civil rights movement, black politicians have made almost no progress representing anything but predominantly black areas. Since the 1960s, there have been only two African American senators and a single African American governor—none of whom are currently in office. The reason for the poor showing is that African American candidates for statewide office nearly always end up in a catch-22: Attempts to motivate their African American base usually alienate white moderates. And, when black candidates try to tailor their message to white moderates, they dampen enthusiasm among African Americans and liberals.

Obama is one of the very, very few African American candidates since the civil rights era to whom these constraints don't seem to apply: Despite having run as a black progressive, he managed to win over white, blue-collar Democrats across the state in this winter's Illinois Senate primary, taking *53 percent* of the vote. That's nearly unheard of in a seven-candidate field, one which included multimillionaire Blair Hull; Dan Hynes, the scion of a prominent Chicago political family (and the current state comptroller); another African American candidate; and a prominent Latino.

Integral to Obama's success are the factors he cites in his speech: his unusual racial and cultural background. Whereas many working-class voters are wary of African American candidates, whom they think will promote black interests at the expense of their own, they simply don't see

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Obama in these terms. This allows him to appeal to white voters on traditional Democratic issues like jobs, health care, and education—just like a white candidate would.

Shortly after Obama's speech, I break off from the scrum surrounding him and approach two middle-aged men, who identify themselves as officials from the local branch of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. The first, a short, bearded man, is effusive. He tells me this is the first time he has seen Obama in person and that he especially liked the fact that Obama didn't put anyone down, even Republicans. When he's finished, the second, a heavyset, balding man, slaps me on the back so hard I almost knock his friend over. "The thing about Obama," he gushes, "is that there are no racial lines, there are no party lines. He reaches everybody."

BARACK OBAMA, NOW 42, was groomed for higher office from pretty much the day he entered the Illinois state Senate in 1997. It was then that Emil Jones, the chamber's powerful minority leader (and now its president), took an interest in Obama's career, personally dispatching an aide to handle his press and strategy. But, despite the lofty expectations, Obama's first attempt to reach beyond the state Capitol was a disaster. In 1999, he decided to challenge four-term Representative Bobby Rush for his congressional seat. But Rush, a former Black Panther and community activist, enjoyed a stature in the South Side's heavily black first district that made him nearly impossible to dislodge. It didn't help that, throughout the race, Rush's campaign painted Obama as an overeducated technocrat from Harvard, where he'd earned a law degree. Obama's campaign naturally interpreted these jabs as cynical nods to black ambivalence about educational achievement. But the damage from intimations that Obama wasn't "black enough"—that he "[hadn't] been around the first congressional district long enough to really see what's going on," as Rush charged—was difficult to contain. "It was a delineation that was effective," says one Obama aide. Obama lost by a two-to-one margin.

But, if Rush made racial identity an issue for voters, it was an issue Obama had long ago resolved for himself. Not that the path to that resolution had been easy. For Obama, the product of a brief marriage between a Kenyan father and a white mother, racial ambiguity was an early fact of life. Obama's mother married an Indonesian man shortly after his parents' separation, and the family moved from Hawaii to Indonesia when he was still in elementary school. Obama recalls in his 1995 autobiography, *Dreams From My Father*, how his mother fed him a steady diet of idealized black images during his years in Indonesia: "She would come home with books on the civil rights movement, the recordings of Mahalia Jackson, the speeches of Dr. King." It was only at age nine, when Obama stumbled across a picture of an African American who'd tried to lighten his complexion, that he discovered that being black might be a source of shame to some in the United States.

The years that followed were no less confusing. Obama returned to Hawaii the following year to live with his white grandparents and attend the elite Punahou School, where he was one of only a handful of African American students. Obama describes his adolescence as a period of rebellion: His grades slipped, he experimented with drugs, and he generally emulated stereotypes of African American males, even if he could never shake the suspicion that he was just acting a part. ("At least on the basketball court I could find a community of sorts," Obama writes of his countless hours spent playing the sport.) The image finally began to wear thin when Obama arrived at Occidental College in Los Angeles. In one of the more poignant passages of his book, Obama recounts an exchange he had with two black classmates: Marcus, "the most conscious of brothers, ... his lineage was pure, his loyalties clear, and for that reason he always made me feel a little off balance"; and Tim, who "wore argyle sweaters and pressed jeans and talked like Beaver Cleaver."

One night Obama was hanging out with Marcus when Tim came by and asked for the day's economics assignment. "Tim's a trip, ain't he? Should change his name from Tim to Tom," Obama recalls saying, thinking it was what Marcus wanted to hear. Instead the comment brought a stern rebuke. "Tim seems all right to me," Marcus said. "He's going about his business. Don't bother nobody. Seems to me we should be worrying about whether our own stuff's together instead of passing judgment on how other folks are supposed to act."

What makes both the book and author interesting is that Obama's eventual response to his multicultural background was neither to shun his black identity, nor to shore it up by segregating himself from whites. It was to be racially proud, while striving to succeed in mainstream (and predominantly white) institutions. Obama had moved to Chicago to work as a community organizer not long after graduating from college. Shortly before leaving Chicago for Harvard, he had a meeting with the Reverend Jeremiah Wright, the charismatic black pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ, one of the most socioeconomically diverse all-black congregations in Chicago. Obama was taken with Wright's worldview, perhaps best encapsulated by a Trinity brochure proclaiming that, "while it is permissible to chase 'middleincomeness' with all our might," ambitious African Americans must beware the "psychological entrapment of black 'middleclassness' that hypnotizes the successful brother or sister into believing they are better than the rest of US." Obama would go on to become the first black president of the prestigious *Harvard Law Review* before returning to Chicago, where he and his wife, Michelle, became members of Trinity.

RACE HAS, OF COURSE, always been an issue for African American political candidates, and it has generally compelled their campaigns to take one of two forms. The first—what you might call the Bobby Rush strategy—has been to rely either exclusively on African American voters or on a coalition of African Americans and white liberals, with little attempt to reach

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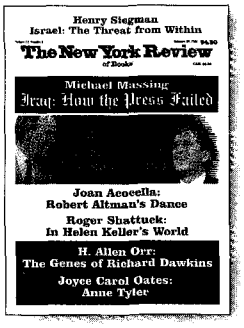

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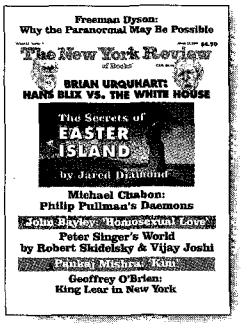

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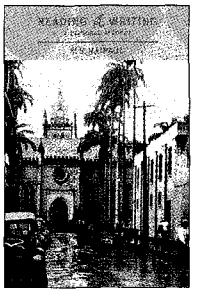

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white moderates. The last black U.S. senator—Carol Moseley Braun, also from Illinois—essentially pursued this strategy, patching together a coalition of blacks and liberals in her 1992 campaign. (Braun did win over some moderate Republican women, but it was thanks almost entirely to her being a woman in a year when abortion rights and the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill controversy weighed heavily on the minds of female voters. She lost her reelection bid decisively in 1998.) Harold Washington, the only African American mayor of Chicago, pursued an even more racially segregated strategy, winning with just over 51 percent of the vote against his Republican opponent in 1983, in an overwhelmingly Democratic city.

The problem with this approach, of course, is that it has tended to limit African American politicians to areas where African Americans and white liberals add up to a majority. To win elections in parts of the country where culturally moderate whites are the decisive swing voters—which is to say, most of America—African American candidates have attempted a second approach: de-emphasizing race and running to the political center. Perhaps the most successful of these candidates was former Virginia Governor Douglas Wilder, a longtime state senator who first won a dramatic victory as lieutenant governor in 1985. Paul Goldman, a top Wilder adviser who managed the campaign, recalls that he avoided drawing excessive attention to Wilder's race whenever possible—for example, by declining to cast Wilder in some of his own commercials. Meanwhile, Wilder positioned himself as a moderate on taxes and crime. (One of Wilder's most famous ads featured a local white cop testifying to his fitness for office.) Goldman also relied heavily on Wilder's heroism during the Korean War. The campaign ran on the slogan FROM KOREA TO RICHMOND, HE'S STILL FIGHTING FOR VIRGINIA in hopes of capitalizing on the state's rich military tradition.

But, though Wilder won both the 1985 race and his 1989 campaign for governor, these episodes testify as much to the limits of his election strategy as to its effectiveness. Wilder won the governorship by less than 1 percent—and even that was thanks to the unusual resonance of his pro-choice views on abortion at a time when the issue was all over the news. "Every time we took the abortion position [off the agenda] and we'd spend the week talking about something else, we'd lose pro-choice Republican women," laments Goldman.

Wilder also fell victim to stereotypes about black candidates, whom whites tend to see as overly tolerant of crime and devoted to government programs that primarily benefit African Americans. "Many of the stereotypes about [blacks] and liberals are the same," says pollster Celinda Lake, a veteran of several statewide campaigns involving African Americans. These stereotypes almost always doom blacks running in majority-white areas. Jesse Helms twice defeated Harvey Gantt, a charismatic black architect and business-friendly former mayor of Charlotte, North Carolina, by playing on white resentment of affirmative action. New York state Comptroller Carl McCall lost by 16 points to Republican George Pataki in the 2002 gubernatorial race, even though the state is home to some two million more Democrats than Republicans. And the same stereotypes nearly doomed Wilder as well. Despite his outspoken positions on taxes (he had pledged not to raise them) and social issues like the death penalty (which he supported), campaign polling showed that few white voters actually believed him.

In any case, Wilder was able to run to the center because his status as a civil rights leader—he initiated the fight in the state Senate against the racially divisive state song in 1970—meant he didn't have to worry so much about alienating blacks. Other black candidates haven't been so lucky. Missouri Representative Alan Wheat suffered from low black turnout in his 1994 U.S. Senate race against ex-Governor John Ashcroft partly because of the energy he spent courting whites. Even more instructive about the pitfalls of failing to excite the African American base is the example of Cory Booker, a black city councilman in Newark, New Jersey, whose statewide ambitions were (at least temporarily) derailed in a losing mayoral race in 2002. Booker, a Rhodes scholar and Yale Law School graduate who had actually moved into a Newark housing project to live among his poorest constituents, had been the darling of affluent whites in the New York metropolitan area (who largely bankrolled his campaign). His iconoclastic ideas about social policy—he was, for example, an advocate of school vouchers and faith-based social initiatives—and his impressive cultural fluency (Booker had been president of the Oxford L'Chaim Society) brought praise from conservatives like George Will and Jack Kemp and fawning coverage from *The New York Times*.

But Booker's campaign foundered on accusations that he wasn't authentically black, which his opponent, incumbent Mayor Sharpe James, took pains to fan. James would appear before black congregations and claim (outrageously) that Booker was receiving money from the Ku Klux Klan. His campaign distributed flyers in housing projects that depicted Booker with an exaggerated nose, to make him look Jewish. ("You have to learn to be an African American, and we don't have time to train you," James would say of Booker.) Meanwhile, the fact that Booker wasn't married lent credence to whispers that he was gay. "My feeling was that the bullshit about Cory's difference—'Is he black enough?'—made it a lot harder," says one Booker aide.

WHEN OBAMA ENTERED the Senate race in January 2003, he quickly dispelled any suspicion that he might attempt to replicate Wilder's strategy for appealing to moderate whites. He was unapologetically liberal, outspoken in his opposition to the Iraq war, and proud of the progressive legislation he'd passed in the state Senate. His campaign touted his role in passing a bill intended to reduce the rate of wrongful executions by requiring homicide confessions to be videotaped and another designed to crack down on racial profiling by requiring police to record the race of in-

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dividuals they searched. Obama also claimed credit for extending the life of a state-sponsored health insurance program for children and emphasized his efforts at creating a job-training program for unskilled workers.

More important, Obama played up his achievements in a way that called attention to his race. David Axelrod, a media consultant and Obama aide who was simultaneously advising John Edwards, believed Obama's biography was perfect raw material for the kind of hopeful themes he was crafting for the North Carolina senator's presidential campaign—particularly Obama's status as the first-ever black president of the *Harvard Law Review*. "It worked on two levels," Axelrod says. "For those for whom the knocking down of barriers is important, it was very important. For others, *Harvard Law Review* was a big credential." In Obama's first advertisement, the telegenic state senator looks at the camera and explains, "They said an African American had never led the *Harvard Law Review*—until I changed that." The commercial concludes, "Now they say we can't change Washington, D.C. ... I approved this message to say, 'Yes we can.' "

Not surprisingly, white liberals were the first group other than African Americans among whom Obama caught fire. "My moment was a focus group," recalls Obama's campaign manager, Jim Cauley. "The moderator was talking to [liberal, North Shore] women voters, thirty-five to fifty-five and fifty-five plus. He asked the older group, 'Who do each of these guys remind you of?' For [state Comptroller] Dan Hynes, a woman said, 'Dan Quayle.' For [the fabulously wealthy Blair] Hull, she said, 'Embalmed.' And she looked at Barack, and the lady said, 'Sidney Poitier.' At that moment, I was like, 'Shit, this is real.' "

Not long after, Obama ran into a bit of luck. The media turned up evidence that Hull's ex-wife had sought a restraining order against him, and Hull's campaign, which had built a ten-point lead, imploded after the candidate essentially admitted to having abused her. Still, it was by no means clear Obama would become the race's front-runner. His appeal to white moderates remained unproven, and the record of politicians like Gantt and McCall was hardly encouraging. Compounding Obama's problem was a factor almost as immutable as his race: his name. That it would be hopeless to run for statewide office with a last name that rhymes with "Osama" was more or less the accepted wisdom when Obama entered the race.

In fact, the truth is closer to the opposite. In 1993, sociologists Jan Rosenberg, of Long Island University, and Philip Kasinitz, of Hunter College, stumbled across an interesting finding in their study of the Red Hook section of Brooklyn: While white employers in the area were perfectly comfortable—even eager—to employ West Indian immigrants from outside the neighborhood, most were deadset against hiring local African Americans and Puerto Ricans. One local employer boasted of the team of West Indians he'd hired to guard his factory, but, when asked about hiring local African Americans, remarked, "What, the bums hanging around outside? You want me to hire the guys who are trying to rob me?"

As *The New Yorker*'s Malcolm Gladwell explained the finding in 1996:

> It was not that the employers did not like blacks and Hispanics. It was that they had developed an elaborate mechanism for distinguishing between those they felt were "good" blacks and those they felt were "bad" blacks. "Good" meant that you came from outside the neighborhood, because employers identified locals with the crime and dissipation they saw on the streets around them. "Good" also meant that you were an immigrant, because employers felt that being an immigrant implied a loyalty and a willingness to work and learn not found among the native-born.

The distinction between "good" blacks and "bad" blacks has a rich pedigree in the United States. Sociologists have for decades commented on the differences in the ways white New Yorkers relate to Jamaican immigrants, as opposed to native-born African Americans. And Jamaican immigrants have, in turn, drawn similar distinctions. "The most important element in Jamaican (and West Indian) ethnicity in New York City is a self-perception that Jamaicans are hard-working, goal-oriented, success-driven individuals—in short, achievers," the sociologist Milton Vickerman (himself a Jamaican immigrant) wrote in an article published in the 2001 anthology *New Immigrants in New York*, which drew on work he did in the 1980s. "Jamaicans assert their ethnic identity to show that they are different from African Americans."

A similar dynamic appears to apply to African immigrants. Paul Stoller, an anthropologist at West Chester University in Pennsylvania who has spent years studying West African street vendors in New York City, notes that, when suppliers learn that a black customer is African, they extend him more generous terms of credit. The vendors "feel that [the suppliers] put them in a different category than African Americans," says Stoller. Other social scientists have made similar discoveries. JoAnn D'Alisera, an anthropologist at the University of Arkansas, who spent three years working with Sierra Leonean immigrants in Washington, D.C., recalls that, time and again, whites would treat her Sierra Leonean subjects differently once they discovered they were African as opposed to African American. "We'd go to the mall, and they wouldn't be wearing African clothing, just jeans and a T-shirt, and [the clerks] would assume that they were African American," D'Alisera reflects. "But, once they started to engage, there would be another response. ... There are a lot of people out there who think that, if you're African, you're more educated, harder-working."

The assumption even holds true in pop culture. In the popular imagination, many African American basketball players are either thugs or hip-hop wannabes, or both. By contrast, every other mention of African players, such as the Congolese-born Dikembe Mutombo, cites the good deeds they do in their native countries or the multiple languages they speak (Mutombo speaks nine). The news coverage of

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Amadou Diallo, the Guinean immigrant mistakenly gunned down by four New York City police officers in February 1999, portrayed him as a model citizen. "A HARD WORKER WITH A GENTLE SMILE," read a typical headline in *The New York Times*.

The point is that, once voters saw Obama's ads and realized he was not, in fact, an Islamic fundamentalist, Obama's name—or at least its provenance—may have actually helped him, by distinguishing him from other African Americans.

At least that's the implication of the way the race played out. The TV blitz the Obama campaign unleashed in the Chicago metro area during the last three weeks of the race—and downstate in the last six days—paid huge dividends among white voters, particularly in the collar counties, where Obama had done little campaigning. Obama ended up carrying 50 of blue-collar Joliet's 52 precincts. Likewise, he managed to win pluralities in several white ethnic wards in Chicago, the kinds of places Washington lost by huge margins in 1983. And Obama managed to attract white voters without eroding his standing among his core supporters. Indeed, the impressive margins among working-class whites paled in comparison with his margins among African Americans (about 90 percent or higher in ten heavily African American wards in Chicago, where turnout was up as much as 30 percent over recent elections).

Obama performed so well among all demographics that one is tempted to conclude that working-class whites are simply more open to voting for black politicians than they were even five or ten years ago. But that would be a mistake. Anita Dunn, who worked for Hull and sat in on that campaign's focus groups, notes that the only time suburban and exurban white voters ever responded negatively to Obama was when he was associated with more conventional black politicians. "We [showed voters a sound] bite from Jesse Jackson Junior," says Dunn, referring to a video clip of the Chicago congressman praising Obama. "Collar-county voters didn't like that."

The power of Obama's exotic background to neutralize race as an issue, combined with his elite education and his credential as the first African American *Harvard Law Review* president, made him an African American candidate who was not *stereotypically* African American. "[Obama] is not stereotypically anything," says Mark Blumenthal, the pollster who ran Hull's focus groups. "He's different. He's different because he's biracial. He's a different generation. He's different in terms of qualifications than nine out of ten people who run for office." Free of the burden of reassuring culturally moderate whites that he wasn't threatening, Obama could appeal to their economic self-interest while also exciting his African American and progressive white base. As Jack Carroll, vice president of the machinists' local in Joliet, explained it to me after I'd asked him about Obama's name (which he had assumed was African): "He needs to talk about labor issues, ... talk about what the Republicans are doing to labor laws. To point out the difference between him and [Obama's Republican opponent Jack] Ryan on labor issues, and he won't have any trouble getting elected."

Actually, it's not even clear he'll need to do that. If Obama can replicate his strong showing in Chicago and hold his own in the collar counties, as the primary results suggest he can, Ryan will have to win upward of 75 percent of the downstate vote even to have a chance. "Obama will come out of the city with seventy-five percent of the vote, minimum. Maybe eighty-five," says one Obama aide. "Ryan will have to get fifty to sixty percent in the collars, then sweep us downstate in a landslide." Should Obama so much as win one of the big collar counties like Will (where his vote total exceeded Ryan's in the primary) or make a reasonably strong showing downstate (where he got 24 percent of the vote in the primary), there's almost no way Ryan could win.

IT'S NOT CLEAR how relevant Obama's example is for other African American candidates. There are, after all, only so many former *Harvard Law Review* editors with African names. Moreover, Obama's ability to be African American in a way that doesn't threaten whites is not the only, or even the primary, source of his appeal. His political talent is largely a function of his charisma, and such talent is, by its nature, not reproducible.

In late April, I accompanied Obama to a fund-raiser for Representative Jan Schakowsky at a downtown Chicago hotel. Some 1,500 supporters—the vast majority of them white women—filled an ornate banquet hall for an annual event dubbed the "Ultimate Women's Power Lunch." Even so, the whoops and cheers that accompanied Obama's introduction were an order of magnitude louder than polite applause for the most prominent woman in the room, Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm. This moved Schakowsky to tell a story about a visit to the White House this winter to discuss the situation in Haiti. After the meeting ended and she had put on her jacket, the president noticed the pin on her lapel and took a dramatic step back. "He thinks I'm wearing an Osama button," Schakowsky recalls realizing. When she finally explained to the president that the button was for Barack *Obama*, a Senate candidate from Illinois, Bush was unmoved. "I don't know him," he grumbled. To which Schakowsky responded, "But you will, Mister President."

Schakowsky's prediction is probably a safe bet. The sad fact is that there is no single truly prominent black elected official in the country today, a situation that marginalizes African American voices on everything from education to foreign policy, and creates a vacuum that charlatans like Al Sharpton can exploit for their own gain. Were Obama to win in November, he would instantly become the de facto political leader of the country's African American community. Better still, his intelligence, savvy, and sheer force of personality would quickly make him an important player on Capitol Hill. From his perch in the Senate, he's likely to become a perennial possibility for a spot on a national Democratic ticket. Which is to say, while it's a shame there aren't more candidates like Barack Obama, for the moment, one may be enough. ■

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Arabian Fables (I)

How the Arabs soften up world opinion with fanciful myths.

Josef Goebbels, the infamous propaganda minister of the Nazis, had it right. Just tell people big lies often enough and they will believe them. The Arabs have learned that lesson well. They have swayed world opinion by endlessly repeating myths and lies that have no basis in fact.

What are some of these myths?

The "Palestinians." That is the fundamental myth. The reality is that the concept of "Palestinians" is one that did not exist until about 1948, when the Arab inhabitants of what until then was Palestine, wished to differentiate themselves from the Jews. Until then, the Jews were the Palestinians. There was the Palestinian Brigade of Jewish volunteers in the British World War II Army (at a time when the Palestinian Arabs were in Berlin hatching plans with Adolf Hitler for world conquest and how to kill all the Jews); there was the Palestinian Symphony Orches- tra (all Jews, of course); there was *The Palestine Post*, and so much more.

> "The web of lies and myths that the Arab propaganda machine has created plays an important role in the unrelenting quest to destroy the State of Israel. What a shame that the world has accepted most of it!"

The Arabs, who now call themselves "Palestinians," do so in order to persuade a misinformed world that they are a distinct nationality and that "Palestine" is their ancestral homeland. But, of course, they are no distinct nationality at all. They are entirely the same — in language, customs, and tribal ties — as the Arabs of Syria, Jordan, and beyond. There is no more difference between the "Palestinians" and the other Arabs of those countries than there is between, say, the citizens of Minnesota and of Wisconsin.

What's more, many of the "Palestinians," or their immediate ancestors, came to the area attracted by the prosperity created by the Jews, in what previously had been pretty much of a wasteland.

The nationhood of the "Palestinians" is a myth.

The "West Bank." Again, this is a concept that did not exist until 1948, when the army of the Kingdom of Transjordan, together with five other Arab armies, invaded the Jewish state of Israel, on the very day of its creation.

In what can almost be described as a Biblical miracle, the ragtag Jewish forces defeated the combined Arab might. But Transjordan stayed in possession of the territories of Judea and Samaria and part of the city of Jerusalem. The Jordanians promptly expelled all Jews from the area that they occupied, destroyed all Jewish institutions and houses of worship, used Jewish cemetery headstones to build military latrines, and renamed as "West Bank" what had been Judea and Samaria since time immemorial.

The attempt, quite successful, was to persuade an uninformed world that these territories were ancestral parts of the Jordanian Arab Kingdom (itself a very recent creation of British power diplomacy). Even after the total rout of the Arabs in the 1967 Six-Day War, in which the Jordanians were driven out of Judea/Samaria and of Jerusalem, they and the world continued to call this territory the "West Bank", a geographical concept that cannot be found on any except the most recent maps.

The concept of the "West Bank" is a myth.

The "Occupied Territories." After the victorious Six-Day War, during which the Israeli army defeated the same cabal of Arabs that had invaded the country in 1948, Israel remained in possession of Judea/Samaria (now renamed "West Bank"), which the Jordanians had illegally occupied for 19 years; of the Gaza strip, which had been occupied by the Egyptians but which (hundreds of miles from Egypt proper) had never been part of their country; and of the Golan Heights, a plateau of about 400 square miles, which, though originally part of Palestine, had been ceded to Syria by British-French agreement.

The last sovereign in Judea/Samaria and in Gaza was the British mandatory power — and before it was the Ottoman Empire. All of Palestine, including what is now the Kingdom of Jordan, was, by the Balfour Declaration, destined to be the Jewish National Home. How then could the Israelis be "occupiers" in their own territory? Who would be the sovereign and who the rightful inhabitants?

The concept of "occupied territories" in reference to Judea/Samaria and Gaza is a myth created by Arab propaganda.

Unable so far to destroy Israel on the battlefield — though they are feverishly preparing for their next assault — the Arabs are now trying to overcome and destroy Israel by their acknowledged "policy of stages". That policy is to get as much land as possible carved out of Israel "by peaceful and diplomatic" means, so as to make Israel indefensible and softened up for the final assault. The web of lies and myths that the Arab propaganda machine has created plays an important role in the unrelenting quest to destroy the State of Israel. What a shame that the world has accepted most of it!

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Through the Shadows

HECTOR BABENCO, BORN IN Argentina, has made most of his films in Brazil and the United States, and most of those films have dealt with people on the fringes of society. *Pixote* followed the life of a ten-year-old street criminal in São Paulo. *The Kiss of the Spider Woman*, with William Hurt and Raul Julia, dealt with two men, one of them gay, locked in a South American prison cell. Jack Nicholson and Meryl Streep played homeless alcoholics in *Ironweed*. In all these films, Babenco showed several kinds of strength. Whether or not the film succeeded as a whole, there was never any question about the director's piercing vision or his compassion for those in social darkness.

CARANDIRU
(Sony Pictures Classics)

SEEING OTHER PEOPLE
(Pariah)

Now Babenco caps his career with **CARANDIRU**. Remarkably, he does it with a subject that he has treated before—imprisonment—and that is very familiar in films. At one point in this 155-minute picture, someone even mentions old black-and-white prison movies. But *Carandiru* is not in black and white (like some other recent films, however, its palette is muted), and it is certainly not just another prison movie. No element in the story, or collection of stories, has much novelty: yet the picture grips, because we sense that the director clearly knows he is treating familiar material and forges ahead out of passion.

Formally, Carandiru itself was not a penitentiary but a house of detention in São Paulo, a place where, under Brazilian law, known criminals who had been re-arrested were kept while awaiting trial for new crimes. Eight thousand men were held in a place built for three thousand, and some of them had been there for years. In 1992 a riot flamed in Carandiru: 110 prisoners were killed by the police. The international uproar over what had presumably been a massacre led eventually to the demolition of the building in 2002—recorded here by Babenco. What he doesn't show is the place to which the inmates were transported, possibly because that would only be *Carandiru, Part Two*.

Probably the buzzword "docudrama" must be used for this film: it is factual but re-enacted. Babenco's screenplay, written with three collaborators, comes from a book by a prison doctor, Dráuzio Varella, who was assigned to help stop the spread of AIDS in Carandiru. ("Anyone who says he doesn't have sex here is a liar," one of the inmates tells Varella.) The doctor's true concern, his acceptance of the inmates' ethics and of their own judicial system, gains their confidence. He utters no word of comment, but his very experience in Carandiru is a declaration. He sees, as do we, that the legal system—everywhere—moves toward the reform of a criminal by locking him up with other criminals. (The idea of prison as a deterrent is a cackling joke: if prisons had deterred through the centuries, there would no longer be any.) Yes, society must be protected, and no generally available substitute for prison has yet been found. So Babenco is here concerned with the inner society created by the self-protection of the larger society.

None of this, I repeat, is new. All of this, I repeat, is gripping: because Babenco has fashioned his film without polemic intent but with all the art at his command, which is considerable. He has allowed the content to speak for itself. Some flashback sequences about prisoners' previous lives take place of course outside the prison: otherwise, we watch the unrolling of a giant tapestry, woven with scenes that range from degradation to a kind of warped probity. Babenco's camera wriggles into crowded cells, and it also encompasses volatile crowds. The riot itself and its sequel are breathtaking spectacle.

The large cast, from killers to "queens," is flawless. Perhaps the modest doctor should be urged to take a bow—Luiz Carlos Vasconcelos, who gives us a man who understands more than he talks about. Notable, too, throughout the picture is the lighting by Walter Carvalho, which maintains the atmosphere of enclosure without melodrama.

At the last, *Carandiru* must leave the problem where Babenco found it. Which is where Bernard Shaw found it in 1925. Here is the first sentence of Shaw's long essay on this subject: "Imprisonment as it exists today is a worse crime than any of those committed by its victims; for no single criminal can be as powerful for evil, or as unrestrained in its exercise, as an organized nation." Babenco, whether he knows it or not, breathes amen.

To another planet—California. Seeking refreshment, I went to **SEEING OTHER PEOPLE**, which is about sexual games in the Los Angeles area. But its chief effect was to leave me forlorn. The premise suggested a light touch, perhaps even a breath of last century's European froth. Alice and Ed, in their twenties, are affianced, have been living together for five years, and are about to be married. Alice gets the idea that she and Ed ought to have more experience of sex with other people before they lock in. She has previously had only three lovers ("only" is her word), and Ed doesn't offer any numbers. He is at first shocked by her suggestion, but she insists and he agrees. While remaining together and bedding together, each looks for and finds variety.

This might once have been called a continental idea, the sort of witty plot that might have appealed to, say, Hermann Bahr. A century ago this Viennese wrote *The Concert*, a comedy about a man and a woman who meet because the man's wife and the woman's husband are off on a rendezvous together. Bahr might have made this film amusing by tickling delicately the thoughts that we keep to

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ourselves. But I missed his touch. In the hands of the screenwriters Maya Forbes and Wally Wolodarsky (who also directed), the idea becomes just a conveyor belt for a series of doggedly naughty skits.

Obviously it is odd to judge *Seeing Other People* by the degree to which it resembles last century's European comedy, but its very reminder of Bahr, and of other writers who amused in his vein, helps to make this film a small index of current tastes. Sex is most interesting when it happens to the young. Sex is almost as depersonalized as gym. Males and females think it hip to suggest availability; feeling and focus are what mom and dad used to worry about. When, between and after their various adventures, Alice and Ed affirm their love for each other, we almost feel that—in the characters' lives, more than in this script—their dialogue has been ordained for them by current codes. The progress of the film is so mechanical that we can only wait for the finish, knowing far ahead of time what it will be. ■

ROBERT BRUSTEIN ON THEATER

Pyrotechnics and Ice

I FIRST SAW TOM STOPPARD'S metaphysical comedy **JUMPERS** when I was guest drama critic for the London *Observer* in 1972. It starred Michael Holdern as a dotty professor of philosophy and the splendid Diana Rigg as his musical-comedy-actress wife. The production was created under the auspices of Laurence Olivier's National Theatre, then in residence at the Old Vic. Stoppard, who had attracted considerable attention nine years earlier with *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, was immediately established as the most literate of the younger playwrights being wooed to the National by Olivier's literary manager, Kenneth Tynan.

JUMPERS
(Brooks Atkinson Theater)

FROZEN
(Circle in the Square)

Literate is an understatement. Stoppard, who completed only two years of high school before starting work as a journalist and later as a drama critic for various newspapers (under the pseudonym William Boot), may be one of the most extraordinary autodidacts in literary history. He is also one of the most belletristic of playwrights. His works generally lift off from some literary or historical launching pad: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is famously a theatrical gloss on two of Shakespeare's minor characters examined through the bifocals of Samuel Beckett; *Travesties* revolves around Lenin, James Joyce, and Tristan Tzara (among others) in Zurich; *Arcadia* is a pastoral wit comedy inspired by Oscar Wilde and Thomas Love Peacock, featuring characters based on Lord Byron and F. R. Leavis; *The Invention of Love* chronicles the hopeless yearning of the Oxford poet A. E. Housman for a fellow student; and *Shakespeare in Love*, the charming movie Stoppard co-wrote with Marc Norman (perhaps his most feeling work), imagines Shakespeare in a bootless love affair that might have inspired *Romeo and Juliet*.

Like Shaw, Stoppard has always been an omnivorous reader and has never been reluctant to share his scholarship with his audiences. If I still can't get as excited about his playwriting as my fellow critics (and my Harvard undergraduates), that is because his wit and erudition have always seemed to be more on display than his capacity to penetrate the skin of human consciousness. *Jumpers* (now playing at the Brooks Atkinson) is an early example of such intellectual showboating. Its central metaphor is embodied in the eponymous gymnasts who act as the play's chorus, performing calisthenics throughout the evening for no apparent reason—except insofar as their physical gyrations reflect the cerebral acrobatics of their author.

In *Jumpers*, Stoppard is eager to impress us with his readings in the philosophy of logical positivism, particularly that of A. J. Ayer, on whom his absentminded central character, George Moore, seems to be based. (Paradoxically, his wife, Dorothy, is the one who is known as "Dottie.") I don't mind being instructed in the rudiments of such first causes as the existence of God, the anthropological roots of cannibalism, the nature of altruism, and the paradox of Zeno's arrow. In fact, the philosophical content of *Jumpers*, dictated by George in long-winded speeches to his silent secretary, is a reasonable substitute for a short course in moral philosophy and epistemology. And yes, the idea of contrasting the sterile logorrhea of an academic fuddy-duddy with the emotional breakdown of his glamorous wife ("from the metaphysical to the physical") is not without theatrical value. The fact that Dottie, who doesn't even know where the kitchen is, is cuckolding her husband with the vice chancellor of the university (Sir Archibald Jumper, "M.D., D.Phil., D.Litt., L.D., D.P.M., D.P.T.") also holds some promise for drollery.

Intriguing as well is the hint of a political theme. The "Radical-Liberals" have scored a victory that may or may not be a coup d'état, and the acrobats, or jumpers, are celebrating the event at a victory party at which Dorothy is shakily trying to perform. That one of them is murdered in mid-calisthenic is obviously intended as an important plot motif, but like so much else in this play the crime is shrouded in mystery and irrelevance. We are told that the dead jumper is also a professor of philosophy, whose discrediting of absolute values such as beauty and goodness George (in an endless peroration) is trying to dispute. But the dead man's role in the play remains maddeningly peripheral. A detective called Bones—apparently on loan from Joe Orton—comes on stage to help solve the mystery. But, like everyone else, he is too smitten with Dorothy's charms to bother to weigh the evidence.

Dorothy is the prime suspect. Indeed, the corpse is discovered hanging in her bedroom closet before being removed in a plastic bag by the gymnasts. But the flaw in *Jumpers*, and I'm afraid it is a near-fatal flaw, is that the play's style bears no relation to its story. The murder serves mainly as a stimulus for the sangfroid of Sir Archie, the star worship of Bones, and the confusion of George; and although the real culprit is perfunctorily identified by the end, the crime really has little function other than to serve as a stimulus for Stoppard's wit. As for Dorothy, she is a woefully underwritten character who largely serves as a sexual

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magnet for all the males. She has a smattering of philosophy herself, having been a student in George's class, but otherwise her blonde head is as empty as the lunar landscape that occasionally appears, for no apparent reason, on a grainy television screen. Oh, yes—in a background plot, the British have landed on the moon, and one of the astronauts has apparently killed his subordinate. But this, too, is largely decorative detail. Indeed, the play is so full of pointless stuffing that the only thing keeping it afloat is its buoyant, whimsical tone.

Whimsy is humor at its most precious, and preciosity is intellect at its most self-conscious. That may be why *Jumpers* leaves me feeling so empty and so unsatisfied. The philosophical references begin to sound like intellectual name-dropping, and the question of whether or not God exists assumes as much importance as who killed Cock Robin. The play is rather like the marriage of Dottie and George—show-business splash mismatched with arid academicism.

David Leveaux's vaudevillian production tries to inject some of the emotional juice that Stoppard fails to squeeze himself, partly through the use of sentimental pop tunes. Vicki Mortimer's set is too garish for my taste, and it changes much too often. But Leveaux has supervised some strong performances, notably from Essie Davis as a vacant, despairing Dottie, perched on a pockmarked crescent moon against a background of stars; Nicky Henson as a stone-faced Sir Archibald, alternately Dottie's lover, gynecologist, and defense attorney; and Simon Russell Beale as George. Dressed in a green cardigan and suspenders and sporting a pixie grin, Beale is the actor who best demonstrates Stoppard's debt to Oscar Wilde in the way he takes serious things frivolously and frivolous things seriously. Often miscast as heroic characters, he creates here an engaging scholastic, lost in thought. Like Stoppard, Beale draws on a tradition of British wit comedy that began with *The Man of Mode* and climaxed in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Someday I would like to see him play Sir Fopling Flutter or Algernon Moncrieff. And someday I would like to see Tom Stoppard curb his genius for literary impersonation for a moment in order to explore the secret corridors of the human heart.

The Progress

Soft missiles hitting home release a shaft
of call it light from nowhere (what they touch
has waited a long time
for this illumination); then drift off
transparently, with no more fuss than sunlight
when it crosses a lawn from dawn to dusk.
How effortless and easy? Don't believe it.
How fugitive. Recall
with what birdlike brushings Memory
revisits—not at our behest, but whenever it pleases her to pass our way,
with a regard now open to the sky,
now narrow as a cat's
eye in the afternoon. A single slit
accommodates all span, growth, change; a single
golden dust-mote-studded ray picks out
a pair of hands
swabbing a counter, smoothing a child's hair,
taking something silken from a box,
holding it up, shaking it out to air.

RACHEL HADAS

[redacted]

FROZEN, by Bryony Lavery, another English dramatist, might serve as an excellent model for such an exploration. Written in the terse staccato style of Edward Bond, the play is a study of serial child murder and its appalling effect on the mother of one of the victims. *Frozen* (produced by MCC Theater at Circle in the Square) is written with virtually no decorative flourishes or verbal imagery. Its only metaphor is the title, which characterizes the nature of the killer's brain, the state of the mother's heart, the content of her dreams, and even the background of the American criminologist who comes to investigate the case (her family comes from Iceland). The metaphor is extended visually in the icy blue tones of Hugh Landwehr's setting.

In fact, the only flaw in this otherwise painfully honest play is its overworking of the Arctic imagery. Otherwise, there is not a line of dialogue or an element of character that does not seem tempered in the crucible of truth. The central sufferer is Nancy Shirley (Swoosie Kurtz), whose daughter Rhona, abducted at the age of ten, has been missing for twenty years. Nancy has joined an organization called FLAME, dedicated to consoling parents with similar heartaches. And now, at last, her daughter's killer has been identified and imprisoned.

But *Frozen* is not the sociological treatise it could so easily become. Indeed, the play is devoted to testing the social theories of Agnetha (Laila Robins), the American criminologist, against the recalcitrant nature of a truly heartless criminal named Ralph (Brian F. O'Byrne). Agnetha, examining "the Arctic frozen sea of the criminal brain," has come to believe that there is a distinction between what she calls "crimes of evil and crimes of illness," the one being a "sin" and the other a "symptom." Like most liberal Americans, in other words, Agnetha cannot tolerate the concept of evil. Rape and murder, for her, are the result of early physiological or psychological damage in a criminal who is as much a victim as his quarry. (In other words, he is depraved because he is deprived.) As a result, she believes that even the most heinous crimes, such as those committed by the totally unrepentant Ralph, can be causally explained. "Serial Killing ... A Forgivable Act?" is the provocative title of her thesis.

Nancy's surviving daughter, who shares similar beliefs, pleads with her mother to "let go of her anger" and forgive Rhona's murderer. And the arc of the play is Nancy's journey from blistering hatred ("If I go to see him I'm taking a gun, blow his brains all over the wall, I'm taking a knife, slice his thing off, stick the blade through his eye and take out his brains that thought what he thought to do what he did.... She was my little girl!") to the point where she is willing to visit Ralph in jail. That visit is the powerful climax of the play.

In previous interviews with Agnetha, Ralph has confessed that the only thing he regrets about the rape and murder of little girls is that it isn't legal. Blustering, whining, fuming, proudly displaying his tattoos, Ralph finally reveals some history of child abuse himself, as Agnetha anticipated. But it is Nancy's visit, when she makes him realize that the pain he experienced from his father's blows was similar to what her little girl felt when he hurt and frightened her, that finally penetrates his crustacean soul. In a mortal blow, she even forgives him. (The misery this causes him reminds me of the way

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Shaw's wife-beater Bill Walker was tormented by Major Barbara's merciless compassion.) After trying to compose a letter expressing his guilt, Ralph hangs himself in prison. The author doesn't say whether or not this outcome was precisely Nancy's intention.

Bryony Lavery's symphony of sorrow and revenge is conducted without a single maudlin or overwrought note, and it is performed with the same ruthless, searing honesty with which it is written. Doug Hughes has staged a production, punctuated by stings of light and sound, that in its precision and depth once again indicates that he is presently unmatched as a director of new work. Laila Robins, as Agnetha, is required to do a lot of blubbering over a love affair that is not sufficiently fleshed out by the author. But she manages well the difficult task of attracting sympathy to a character who lives by theoretical constructs. Brian O'Byrne's Ralph is a mean, lowering thug apparently without a single redeeming quality, yet the actor manages to reveal a shaft of redemptive light beneath the slime. And Swoosie Kurtz as Nancy, her large eyes blazing with anger, her wide mouth compressed with hate, provides what may be the most nuanced and powerful performance of the year. The moment when she examines her daughter's skull and finds it beautiful—"I can feel her head, its shape and texture and resilience, and I'm flooded with Joy!!!"—is a radiant stroke of writing and acting in a relentlessly truthful, remorselessly bleak play. ■

Ruth Franklin

Identity Theft

True memory, false memory, and the Holocaust.

I.

NEARLY TEN YEARS AGO, A man calling himself Benjamin Wilkomirski published *Fragments*, which purported to be a memoir of his experiences in Majdanek and Birkenau. The book was initially well received, in Germany and in the United States, and Wilkomirski became a popular guest on the Holocaust circuit. He would appear on stage for his readings wearing a tallis-like shawl, and perform an adaptation of Bruch's "Kol Nidre" on the clarinet. At a meeting in Los Angeles for an organization of child Holocaust survivors, he publicly embraced a woman who, he tearfully claimed, had been a childhood friend of his in the camps.

Wilkomirski's book was, of course, a fraud. He turned out to be Bruno Grosjean, the Protestant son of a Swiss factory worker, who for some time had been obsessed with the Holocaust. In 1972, he attended a concert by the Polish violinist Wanda Wilkomirska, at which someone remarked that he could pass for her brother. The idea apparently lodged in Grosjean's mind, and he concocted the story that appeared in *Fragments* "after two decades of psychological labor on the materials of this invented self," as Robert Alter wrote in these pages several years ago.

Wilkomirski was not the first Holocaust fraud, though his name has since become synonymous with the phenomenon. As long as there has been survivor literature, there have been survivor impostors. The most famous is probably Jerzy Kosinski, author of *The Painted Bird*, another supposedly autobiographical book that has long since been discredited (and from which Wilkomirski apparently borrowed). But what makes Wilkomirski's story particularly interesting is that fact and fiction may actually have fused in his mind: he seems truly to have believed that he was a victim of the camps. Not surprisingly, Holocaust survivors and their families were among the angriest of his debunkers: in the introduction to *Nothing Makes You Free*, his anthology of "writings by descendants of Jewish Holocaust survivors," Melvin Jules Bukiet, a child of survivors himself, named Wilkomirski as an example of "survivor-wannabeness at its grossest."

Ironically, though, Bukiet has himself been at the forefront of what is surely one of the most disturbing trends in contemporary Jewish literature. Call it neo-Wilkomirski-ism: driven by ambition or envy or narcissism, a number of the children of survivors—commonly referred to as "the second generation"—have constructed elaborate literary fictions that serve to elevate their own childhood traumas above and even beyond the sufferings of their parents. Bukiet is among the most egregious of the neo-Wilkomirskis, who also include fiction writers such as Thane Rosenbaum and literary scholars such as Marianne Hirsch. They do not actually believe that they suffered in the camps, obviously; they are not exactly as deluded as Wilkomirski, though they deck themselves out in similar trappings of authenticity. But they have convinced themselves, by means of complicated maneuverings in postmodernism, poststructuralism, and trauma theory, that they are in some essential way primary in this dark story, that the second generation's "experiences" of the Holocaust are just as valid as those of the survivors. The comment of one character, in a story by Lily Brett, is typical: "She said that she sometimes had not been sure that she too hadn't been in Auschwitz. It sounds crazy but I knew what she meant."

AFTER SUCH KNOWLEDGE: MEMORY, HISTORY, AND THE AFTERMATH OF THE HOLOCAUST
By Eva Hoffman
(PublicAffairs, 301 pp., $25)

NOTHING MAKES YOU FREE: WRITINGS BY DESCENDANTS OF JEWISH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS
Edited by Melvin Jules Bukiet
(W. W. Norton, 394 pp., $27.95)

A FAKER'S DOZEN
By Melvin Jules Bukiet
(W. W. Norton, 240 pp., $23.95)

POETRY AFTER AUSCHWITZ: REMEMBERING WHAT ONE NEVER KNEW
By Susan Gubar
(Indiana University Press, 313 pp., $35)

FANTASIES OF WITNESSING: POSTWAR EFFORTS TO EXPERIENCE THE HOLOCAUST
By Gary Weissman
(Cornell University Press, 288 pp., $29.95)

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IT NOT ONLY SOUNDS CRAZY, IT *is* crazy. But in many ways this grotesque solipsism was an inevitable consequence of a movement that sprang from the "I'm OK—You're OK" therapy craze of the early 1980s, which taught Americans that validation is more important than analysis, sympathy more constructive than critique. The term "second generation" was introduced to the reading public by Helen Epstein in 1979 in *Children of the Holocaust*, for which she interviewed hundreds of children of survivors, many of whom spoke of their feelings about the Holocaust and their parents for the first time. Epstein's stark transcriptions of these conversations reveal the rawness of voices that had not yet assimilated their histories into cozy narrative. But the very premise of her investigation—the redefinition of the children of survivors as "children of the Holocaust"—set the preconditions for the most pernicious aspect of this movement: the virtual displacement of the survivors by their own descendants. In American life, and in Jewish life too, there is glamour in trauma, and the children cannot resist stealing their parents' spotlight.

In the twenty-five years since, the "2Gs," in Bukiet's shorthand, have coalesced into an organized movement, whose members gather at conferences and on Internet listservs and are quoted by reporters seeking appropriately somber comments at Holocaust remembrance ceremonies. "How did we, the comfortable children of those who lived through the horror, suddenly become a sociological phenomenon?" Eva Hoffman asks in her memoiristic meditation on the "second-generation condition," describing her own initial recoil when she first heard the phrase. But she has stopped recoiling. She finds that the term also offers "a sort of illumination, and a sort of relief." It shows her that "there were others for whom a Holocaust inheritance was both meaningful and problematic ... that it was in fact an experience; and that, in some way, it counted."

The rise of the "2Gs" has coincided, not entirely coincidentally, with the saturation of American culture and society in all things Holocaust. The American public's "Holocaust consciousness," as Gary Weissman calls it in his forthcoming study of responses to Holocaust literature and film, is usually dated to 1978, when the miniseries *Holocaust* was broadcast on network television. Two years later, *The New York Times* was already quoting Elie Wiesel wondering "whether a saturation point has been reached" at which "mention of the Holocaust produces only apathy." "Holocaust fatigue" increasingly became a theme of anxious journalism during the 1980s and 1990s, even as the public's appetite for the Holocaust raged undiminished: the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum opened to great acclaim in Washington, *Schindler's List* won the Oscar for best picture. Clearly there is no such thing as "Holocaust fatigue," or it would have rendered us all comatose long ago.

MEANWHILE, OTHER CRITICS have taken the opposite position, arguing valiantly in the face of all this contradictory evidence that the Holocaust is too little remembered. "The Holocaust is dying," proclaims Susan Gubar in her recent study of American poetry about the Holocaust (much of it written by members of the second generation), by which she means not only that the remaining survivors will soon pass away but also that there has always been and still exists a taboo on "remembering" the Holocaust in art and literature. It is an unusually weird claim; but Gubar uses it to insist that "it is important now as a dwindling number of survivors enter their seventies and eighties to find in art a bridge over the gulf of discontinuity, to entertain the contrary view that not writing (or, for that matter, not reading) poetry after (and about) Auschwitz constitutes an act of barbarism."

Gubar is alluding, of course, to Adorno's famous remark that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric." This comment has become the straw man of Holocaust studies, adduced always to be knocked down; Adorno himself modified his position in the 1960s. Now, nearly sixty years after the liberation of the camps, it is only occasionally suggested that the Holocaust might not be an appropriate subject for artistic expression—as in the outcry several years ago at an exhibition mounted by the Jewish Museum in New York, in which one artist built a model of a death camp out of Prada packaging and another digitally inserted an image of himself holding a soda can into a photograph of inmates at Buchenwald. Now it is a given that the Holocaust is an important topic for art, even if most would hesitate to call it "the greatest opportunity of our era," as Bukiet does. But the cries of "Holocaust fatigue" are a troubling sign that things have gotten out of hand.

"How should we think about the Shoah from our lengthening distance?" Hoffman asks. "What meanings does it continue to hold for us, what kinds of understanding can we bring to it or garner from it as it recedes from looming view and actual memory into the more remote realm of the past and history?" The question of how to remember the Holocaust falls naturally to the survivors' descendants, but unfortunately they have proved a better example of what not to do. Rather than offering a "bridge over the gulf of discontinuity," the most recent writings by the second generation show that Adorno may have been right after all. A certain kind of literature after Auschwitz is indeed barbaric.

II.

DOES THE "SECOND GENERATION" even exist? No one can deny that the children of Holocaust survivors share common histories and traits, but in this highly generalizable way they resemble the children of any kind of trauma, from immigration to exile, from abuse to alcoholism. Hoffman, the author of two affecting memoirs on growing up as a child of immigrants after the war, wonders about this herself, but finally she concludes that "a growing body of research, literature, and personal testimony makes clear [that] the 'second generation' does constitute a recognizable entity." (What research, what literature, what personal testimony, she does not say.) She defines it, borrowing Benedict Anderson's term, as "an 'imagined community'—that is, a community based not so much on geography or circumstance as on sets of meanings, symbols, and even literary fictions that it has in common and that enable its members to recognize and converse with each other with a sense of mutual belonging." This seems tautological, or even an invitation to exploitation: the second generation is just the group to which its members feel they belong?

If there can be said to be a defining characteristic of the second-generation writers, it is that the Holocaust lies at the very foundation of their consciousness. Their locutions are strikingly similar. "In the beginning was the war," Hoffman writes. Bukiet, as always, is coarser: "In the beginning was Auschwitz." But the particular dilemma of the second gener-

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ation is that though their childhoods were saturated in the details of the Holocaust, they had no direct experience of it. "How do you cope when the most important events of your life occurred before you were born?" Bukiet asks, unaware as usual that this question about the impact of origins makes sense for many, even most, people. Hoffman is more cognizant of the paradox. "The facts [of the Holocaust] seemed to be such an inescapable part of my inner world as to belong to me, to my own experience," she writes. "But of course, they didn't."

Not surprisingly, constructing one's identity according to a negative definition proves unproductive. In our memory-drenched culture, which celebrates lived experience with the fervor that was once reserved for divine revelation, the children of survivors, defined by their own "postness," cannot help but feel, well, secondary. Hoffman diagnoses them with "significance envy," commenting that it is a "staple of second-generation testimony" that the children believed their own everyday troubles to be unmentionably trivial in comparison with the enormity suffered by their parents: " 'It's not the Holocaust,' I would think in my adolescence as I met with some small but hurtful problem—an awkward social encounter, a summer job interview, a friend's rejection, a rebuke from a teacher."

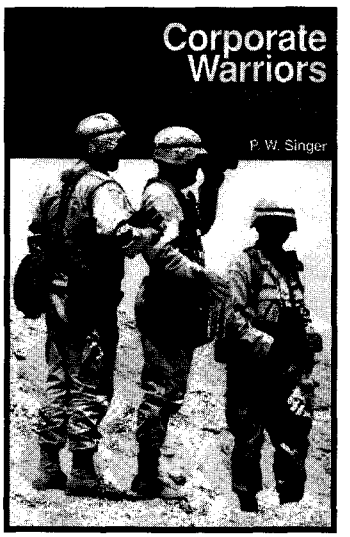
"SIGNIFICANCE ENVY" EXPRESSES itself in a variety of ways, but frequently the result for second-generation writing (Hoffman is being careless when she calls it "testimony") is an unmitigated solipsism. The children may assert, as Bukiet does, that their lives are, at least in some ways, more difficult than their parents': "If a chasm opened in the lives of the First Generation, they could nonetheless sigh on the far side and recall the life Before, but for the Second Generation there is no Before." Thus the parents, who can at least console themselves with memories of a world without Auschwitz, often seem better equipped to deal with life's trials and tribulations—they are less depressed, less neurotic, than their "comfortable children." "They passed on the damage to us, the children sometimes speculate, with wry irony," Hoffman writes. To her credit, she is suspicious of this approach, which she views as a consequence of our therapy-oriented culture: "How long can one blame the parents for the inadequacies of one's precious identity?" But she never disavows it outright. "Significance envy" turns out to be a clever euphemism for the ascription of a really spectacular significance.

Considerably more troubling is the opposite approach: the attempt by the children literally to usurp the parents' "status" as survivors—a term that, as Hoffman rightly notes, has become an honorific. A number of writers succumb to this impulse, but none as unapologetically as Bukiet: "In the midst of this festive free-for-all," he writes, referring to the popularity of the Holocaust as a literary subject, "the 2G's occupy a special place."

> Whatever wisdom others bring to it comes from the heart and head, but for us it's genetic. To be shabbily proprietary, we own it. Our parents owned it, and they gave it to us. Just as John Quincy Adams and Ken Griffey Jr. followed in their parents' footsteps, we go into Shoah business. I'd like to tell everyone from the Bellows

"We must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex."
—President Dwight D. Eisenhower

Corporate Warriors
The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry
P. W. Singer



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> and the Ozicks to the Styrons and the Wilkomirskis, 'Bug off. Find your own bad news,' but no one can legislate artistic imperative, and perhaps no one should.... We have been given an obscene gift, a subject of predetermined value that no one can deny.

It's difficult to say what is most grotesque about this passage—that a mean scribbler such as Bukiet is asserting moral authority over Saul Bellow; that the survivors somehow bequeath their stake in the Holocaust to their children (I can't speak for Bukiet's family, but my own grandparents weren't in "Shoah business," they ran a grocery store); that anybody "owns" anything about the Holocaust. Bukiet's twisted proprietariness does not stop here: he later announces with pride that he uses the number on his father's tattoo, 108016, as his ATM code. Identity thieves, take note!

In comparison, Hoffman can be satisfyingly restrained. "It is important to be precise: we who came after do not have memories of the Holocaust," she states plainly. But this distinction has generally been lost. In her influential book *Family Frames*, which was published in 1997 and quickly assimilated into the Holocaust studies curriculum, Marianne Hirsch, also a child of survivors, coined the term "postmemory" to describe her response to her parents' accounts of the war. Though her "experience" of the Holocaust came only via secondary sources such as stories and photographs, it was for her "no less present, no less vivid, and perhaps because of the constructed and deeply invested nature of memory itself, no less accurate" than her parents', she argues. Postmemory, in short, is still a species of memory. Hirsch's students have carried her idea much further, creating a "Sorceror's Apprentice"-style nightmare of multiplying memory typologies, each less coherent and more diluted than the last: "prosthetic memory," "vicarious memory," "memory of the witness's memory," "hypermediated experiences of memory"—the result of such indirect experiences as viewing photographs or film footage of the Holocaust.

Even those responsible for this strenuous theorizing cannot help but recognize its inadequacy. It leads directly into a false consciousness. For no prosthetic, vicarious, or hypermediated "experience" can substitute for the real thing. And so another common feature of second-generation literature is the desire to "witness the Holocaust as if one were there," as Gary Weissman writes. According to Weissman, this phenomenon is not limited to the children of survivors, but can also be found among people like himself, whom he terms "nonwitnesses"—those members of the postwar generation who have no familial connection to the Holocaust but are nonetheless "deeply interested in studying, remembering, and memorializing it." He finds the roots of this interest in the fact that, despite the prevalence of memorials and movies, the Holocaust, by virtue of its historical distance, "seems unreal or pseudo-real in American culture." Weissman terms this "reality loss," and he calls it "a thorny problem for nonwitnesses ... [who are haunted] not by the traumatic impact of the Holocaust, but by its absence—by a sense that the Holocaust is not enough with us." But his "reality loss" seems simply to be a fancy name for a truly quotidian phenomenon: the passage of time.

Thus have the "theory wars" of the postmodern academy in the 1990s evolved into the "memory wars" of today. What has remained the same, however, is the central focus of these writers and critics: themselves. Bukiet has compared the effect of the Holocaust on Europe to a rock dropped into the center of a pond. This metaphor is unintentionally apt, since each of these writers, gazing in, sees only his or her own reflection.

III.

Citing the work of Paul Celan and Elie Wiesel, Aharon Appelfeld and W. G. Sebald, Hoffman comments that the literature about the Holocaust includes "some of the important, and some of the great, writing of our time." Yet as this brief list reveals, great writing is the exception in Holocaust literature. This is troubling, because one wants to believe that poetry after Auschwitz is not only not barbaric, but also imperative: that literature does offer us a "bridge across the gulf of discontinuity," a great and incomparable opportunity to learn about life, an imaginative access to people and events outside our own realm of experience that we are otherwise unable to achieve. But literature about the Holocaust, especially work written by those who did not experience it, has proven to be full of problems.

To be precise, the writers of the second generation do not write "about" the Holocaust at all. Their subject, and their inspiration, is their family life. Bukiet is unsure whether the second generation were "born writers" or "compelled to write by our proximity to extremity." He gives an example from his family, a story about the liquidation of the Krakow ghetto that his uncle told "at the dinner table." Separated into a group of men destined to be shot, his uncle sneaked back into a group of workers. He caught the eye of Amon Goeth, who asked suspiciously where he worked, and warned that if he turned out to be lying, he would be hanged. "I'd rather be hung tomorrow than shot today," the uncle decides. (Bukiet typically calls this the "punch line.")

It is a good story. But that's all it is: a story. The subject is not, in fact, of "predetermined value"; its value lies in what the writer does with it, and Bukiet doesn't even try. "Rendering life with people who are capable of saying, 'I'd rather be hung tomorrow than shot today. Pass the salt,' becomes one's most enduring subject," he writes. Hoffman wisely cautions against using such material as a crutch. "Writers of the second generation cannot count on the primary power or persuasiveness of their material, on which survivors' memoirs often rely," she remarks, adding astutely that such writers "may end up not so much illuminating the past as turning the searchlight on [their] own narcissism."

To be fair, Bukiet's anthology includes some excellent work. *Nightfather*, by Carl Friedman—she is a Dutch writer who is largely unknown in this country, and I thank Bukiet for introducing me to her fiction—is a collection of vignettes about children of survivors in Holland that shows what it really means to grow up in a household where the Holocaust is discussed at the dinner table. The little girl wants so badly to understand what plagues her father, what causes his depression and fits of temper, but all she knows is that he "has camp," as her mother calls it. At school the girl's teacher praises her drawing of "a man flying through the air." "He isn't flying, he's hanging," the girl corrects her. "See, he's dead, his tongue is blue. And these prisoners have to look at him as punishment. My father is there, too. Here, he's the one with the big ears."

It is hard to convey the peculiar dark humor that accompanies the juxtaposition of the Holocaust with the tropes of daily life. (Art Spiegelman also has done

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it well.) Friedman's writing is often simply, if bitterly, funny—not melodramatic, not self-aggrandizing, not explicitly analytical. In one of the vignettes the children clamor for their father to tell them a story, to which he responds with a tale they know well, of how he once stole dog food to eat.

> "That isn't a story," Simon [the girl's brother] grumbles with disappointment. "That really happened."
>
> "Do you want a story then? Okay, have it your way!" says my father. "Little Red Riding Hood is walking with her basket through the woods. Suddenly a vicious dog jumps out of the *Hundezwinger*. 'Hello, Little Red Riding Hood, where are you going?' 'I'm going to see my grandmother,' says Little Red Riding Hood. 'She's in the hospital block with typhus.' "
>
> "No," says Simon. "That's not how it goes."

BUT SO MUCH OF THE OTHER writing in *Nothing Makes You Free* is as tendentious as the title. (If its appropriation of Auschwitz were not already awful enough, the book's jacket depicts the camp's infamous gate, with the words "Nothing Makes You Free" in place of "*Arbeit Macht Frei*." The analogy between the first generation and the second generation could not be more blatantly suggested.) With their didactic language, clunky dialogue, and transparent metaphors, these pieces sound like rejects from an undergraduate fiction-writing workshop. In one story, the daughter-in-law of a survivor reacts with fury when the elderly woman, left to baby-sit, shaves her infant granddaughter's head. "Those stories are prehistory by now," she fumes at her husband. "You must realize that your mother is crazy. I told you a long time ago. She lost some screws in her head in the Holocaust." In J. J. Steinfeld's "Dancing at the Club Holocaust," a man has hallucinations—and very stilted conversations with his therapist—in which he goes to a club where neo-Nazis watch German propaganda films.

Thane Rosenbaum's "Cattle Car Complex" is the most blatant example of persecution fantasy. A lawyer working late in his glitzy Manhattan office has a panic attack when he gets stuck in the elevator, and emerges literally transformed into a Holocaust victim:

> Light filtered into the car. The stench of amassed filth was evident. It had been a long journey. An unfathomable end.
>
> Adam was sitting on the floor, dressed in soiled rags. Silvery flecks of stubble dappled his bearded face.... His eyes were wide open as he awaited the pronouncement: right or left, in which line was he required to stand?

More generous critics have viewed this as an attempt at magic realism or a depiction of "how present the Holocaust is in the lives of the survivors' children." But the story's ponderously unironic tone makes it difficult to read it as anything other than the sort of second-generation wish-fulfillment that Weissman describes.

Ordinarily, one would be reluctant to draw such direct parallels between the sentiments expressed by a writer's characters and his own beliefs. But a writer such as Bukiet, whose work so explicitly fulfills the program set out in his introduction (a sort of manifesto of second-generation writing), leaves no other option. Bukiet, a professor of creative writing at Sarah Lawrence College who has served as literary editor of *Tikkun* and on the board of Yad Vashem, is the author of many novels and short stories, nearly all related in some way to the Holocaust. In *Stories of an Imaginary Childhood*, he set out to chronicle the life of an adolescent in a Polish shtetl, the world in which he would have grown up had the Holocaust not taken place. His story "The Library of Moloch," included in *Nothing Makes You Free*, describes a professor in charge of a collection of videotaped survivors' testimony who becomes obsessed with recording their experiences down to the grisliest detail. "We are not survivors, but merely remainders, or the remains," one of his subjects tells him. "And you are jackals, feasting on the last tasty flesh that sticks to our bones." Is this satire? Surely a line must be drawn somewhere in the metafictional sand.

In "Tongue of the Jews," in Bukiet's latest collection, a WASP journalist who writes about survivors gets cuckolded by one of his subjects, a Nobel Prize–winner who is an ugly caricature of Elie Wiesel: "He was the voice of atrocity, the

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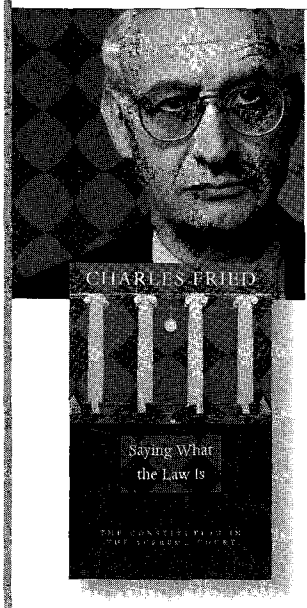

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witness to history, the tongue of the Jews." (By the story's end, that phrase gets twisted into the obvious obscene joke.) The narrator's remarks about "the so-called survivors of Europe" would be insulting if they weren't so laughable: "The supermarket magnate paid his stock boys minimum wage; the builder bought cheap steel in Korea; and the media czar knew how to manipulate politicians to maintain his franchise, but each sent a substantial portion of his profits to the Holocaust Museum in Washington in the marble lobby of which their donations were engraved for all time, or until the building was abandoned and turned into a warehouse for government archives." These comments would be offensive from any writer, but all the more so from one who has been so frequently welcomed, in his guise as the second generation's mouthpiece, to that marble lobby.

IV.

"I SUPPOSE THE BEST THAT WE can ask for, as we contemplate the Shoah from our lengthening distance, is that we distinguish authentic from inauthentic response, genuine perception from varieties of bad faith," Hoffman concludes. "Perhaps sometimes it is better to admit that until we can speak genuinely, we should remain silent." The trouble with this supremely rational judgment is that such distinctions are necessarily personal, and Hoffman offers little guidance on how to make them. Worse, her own judgments are often contradictory. She is right to denounce opportunists such as Bukiet; but elsewhere in her book she becomes so tangled in her own theoretical maneuverings that she winds up condemning anyone who responds differently to the Holocaust than she does.

Hoffman writes of visiting an exhibit of archival materials at Majdanek, which includes a fragment of verse, written by a nine-year-old girl, set to a Polish children's song: "There once was little Elzunia,/She's dying all alone now./For her daddy's in Majdanek,/Her mummy in Auschwitz-Birkenau." Hoffman is taken off-guard by these heartbreaking lines, which strike her "with a wholly penetrating, unprepared sense of pity and sorrow," she comments. And yet in the next breath she castigates another visitor to the exhibit for a different expression of pity and sorrow:

> In the center of the barrack, in front of a large central well, a young woman kneels, and begins to wail. We walk around her gingerly, giving her a wide berth.... I pause for a moment to decide whether she is in need of help. It does not appear to me that she is. It appears to me that she is bringing attention to her extraordinary, her altogether extravagant powers of empathy. It seems to me that she may be luxuriating in her extremely commendable emotion.

This seems unfair. What is so "extravagant" about such an outburst of emotion? Why is there anything "extraordinary" about public weeping at Majdanek, of all places? It's possible, of course, that Hoffman is right about the woman's motivations, but her outburst, on the surface, strikes me as exactly the sort of natural, "unmediated" response to little Elzunia's poem that the second generation continually laments as impossible. Restraint in writing must not be confused with restraint in feeling.

Hoffman finds herself similarly confused when she meets a survivor of the Rwandan genocide at a "garden party" in London. Again she finds herself trapped in the labyrinth of "dialectic," as she calls it, incapable of any kind of response or even thought without instantly second-guessing herself: "It is perhaps a feature of second-generation sensibility that we note such encounters, or even, in some way, court them." (Well, no. I don't know what she means by "courting" the encounter—did she recognize the man as a survivor of genocide and offer to get him a drink?—but I think any person who happened to meet a survivor of genocide at a "garden party" would "note" it as unusual.) He informs her that "the Rwandans are not having a good atrocity aftermath," as she puts it: the United Nations has appointed perpetrators among the judges charged with bringing the Hutus justice; the Tutsis still must live in close proximity to their murderers; the Hutus are without remorse. He worries about how the genocide will be remembered, especially since much of the material evidence—not only of the crimes, but of the people who suffered them—has been destroyed. For this he has looked to Holocaust studies for advice, but he is bewildered by what he has found:

> This survivor was studying in a graduate program at an American university, and he told me that he has benefited from his studies of the Holocaust, and how its memory has been maintained. But he also mentioned with some bafflement that he has read and heard critiques of that "memory" from Jewish people, from those who should be most concerned about it themselves. "Perhaps there are issues that Jewish people have," he says. "Something different from us."
>
> Well, yes, I wanted to say. There are issues. Strange issues, they must seem, from his perspective, from his submergence, and just yesterday's reemergence from horror.

This is what sixty years of theorizing about the Holocaust has taken from us. Faced with the straightforwardness with which the Rwandan cuts through the seemingly infinite layers of "postgeneration dialectic," Hoffman responds to him not with empathy but with a justification of her own "issues." Later in the book, recounting a visit to her parents' village in Poland—in a moving passage, she meets a man who helped to save her parents and delivers to him a half-written letter from her father—she seems to understand that there might be another way. "It is not good not to know where your parents came from, and where your ancestors died or were murdered," she writes simply. And then, inevitably, she ducks back into the dialectical thicket.

"WHAT, THEN, FROM OUR vantage point and moment in time, shall we do about the Holocaust?" Hoffman asks toward the end of her book. Actually, there is nothing we can "do" about the Holocaust; the very phrasing is presumptuous. But "we"—and by that I mean not only the children and grandchildren of survivors, but also nonwitnesses, post-witnesses, pseudo-witnesses, and anyone else who did not experience the greatest catastrophe of the twentieth century—do have an obligation: not only to remember the Holocaust, but also by now, at our vantage point, to situate it properly in historical perspective.

Hoffman recalls an epiphany she had during a visit to the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington:

> As I walked through this most daunting of museum exhibitions, and as I entered into its hellish world as into a

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familiar element, I suddenly thought: but there must also be something outside of this. There must be a reality that is not horror, but that is equally foundational. The Holocaust cannot be the norm that defines the world.

The idea that the Holocaust might actually be the "norm that defines the world" is a common, and disturbing, theme in memoirs of survivors, where it bespeaks a terrible, and in their case perfectly plausible, fatalism. Primo Levi offers one of the starkest images of it in *The Reawakening*, in which he describes "a dream full of horror" that continues to visit him long after the war's end, in which "everything collapses and disintegrates around me, the scenery, the walls, the people.... I am alone in the center of a gray and turbid nothing.... I am in the Lager once more, and nothing is true outside the Lager." In survivors, this degree of possession by the Holocaust is tragic—but in their descendants it is shockingly defeatist. The slogan "*Arbeit Macht Frei*" was a cruel joke, but the idea that "Nothing Makes You Free" is in its way just as sickening. Like Melvin Jules Bukiet's appropriation of his father's concentration-camp number, it is more than fraudulent: it is cheaply perverse, the worst kind of identity theft imaginable.

In her conclusion, Hoffman mentions the Jewish rituals surrounding death, noting that after the dead have been grieved for "fully and deeply," mourning must come to an end. This, as she rightly understands, is a blessing of having been born after the Holocaust: that we are able to see the world both before and beyond it; to understand it as a terrible catastrophe, but not one that marks our daily lives. "How we turn away from the Holocaust matters," she argues, but it matters equally that we do turn away. Otherwise, as she discovered, we make of the world our own personal Holocaust museum, a dreadful cabinet of horrors in which the worst evils of the twentieth century are allowed to wreak their private havoc. ■

Glyn Maxwell

The Twisted Grain

THE COLLECTED POEMS OF WELDON KEES
Edited by Donald Justice
Introduction by David Wojahn
(University of Nebraska, 180 pp., $13.95)

VANISHED ACT: THE LIFE AND ART OF WELDON KEES
By James Reidel
(University of Nebraska, 398 pp., $35)

"I may go to Mexico. To stay."
"Right away?"
"I don't know."
"Weldon, for God's sake don't go without seeing us."
"I won't," he said, and then he hung up.

SUICIDE, AS JEFFREY EUGENIDES observed, is "deeper than death." The names of the dead, in whatever manner they died, are burnished or tarnished or otherwise molded into shape by the nature of their exits, the point at which they stand closest to us, but nowhere is this more forcefully felt than in the names of those who brought themselves to an end. In the case of poets, about whom the suicide is often the fact best known to the wider public, the effect is amplified. To the ordinary citizen, after all, a poet is one handed a gift, and a suicide is one who lets it fall and shatter. The convergence is jarring. "Hart Crane," "Sylvia Plath," "John Berryman": along with a dominant photographic image, a lifestyle, a poetic scent, these sounds carry their inevitable grain of sorrow. Clutching to the heart of each syllable like a demonic child is the fact, the choice, the going through with it in spite of all there is.

So unsettling, so unearthing is the look of this demon that the living do all they can to close their eyes. They blame others, so that they might shift the suicide toward a frightful but at least explicable homicide. If there are no warring spouses or pitiless creditors to fault, they alight on drugs or drink: he was not himself. The need to avert one's eyes is such that if there is an absence of hard facts in support of a suicide, who knows, perhaps it wasn't suicide at all. Weldon Kees, whose car was found abandoned on the Golden Gate Bridge in July 1955, whose last known words are recorded above, and whose body was never found, resided in this gray area for a few years after he vanished.

His mother "saw him" on a cruise ship in Sydney harbor in the late 1950s, sailing the other way. A teenage girl, the daughter of one of Kees's friends, "saw him" in New Orleans in 1962, but he was gone when she looked again. That's pretty much it. Kees was fascinated by suicide and spoke of it a good deal. He was, at forty-one, entirely and distressfully dependent on his parents for money; his new book of poems had been rejected everywhere after his career had begun so promisingly; he had seen his wife slide into alcoholism and mental illness; he was shaken by the news in the post-nuclear world, and had told his friend Michael Grieg the only options he had left were Mexico and jumping from the bridge. One imagines that his file hasn't been opened for some time.

So Kees's act shadows back across his biography, and it's all that his biographer can do to fend it off. There is Kees on the cover of James Reidel's book, forty-one years old, staring into the waters of San Francisco Bay from, yes, the Golden Gate Bridge. The act gives the life its title. But Reidel prefaces the last section of the book, "San Francisco 1950–1955," with almost comically divergent remarks from Kees's acquaintances—"San Francisco must have seemed like rebirth to Weldon" and "Weldon came to die"—which neatly reminds us how, once a suicide is committed, it seeps back into every day of the life that was lived, a life from which it was absent for every day but one. (An unwilled death does not infect the past in this way, it does not seed the past with clues; there are no clues to look for because there is no crime.) Biographers may not believe in Fate at all, but their books are by their nature in thrall to it. They make Weird Sisters of their readers.

SUCH READERS SEE NOT ONLY the future, we see also the past ratcheted up to a monstrous speed. In reading the story of Weldon Kees, we see a restless child

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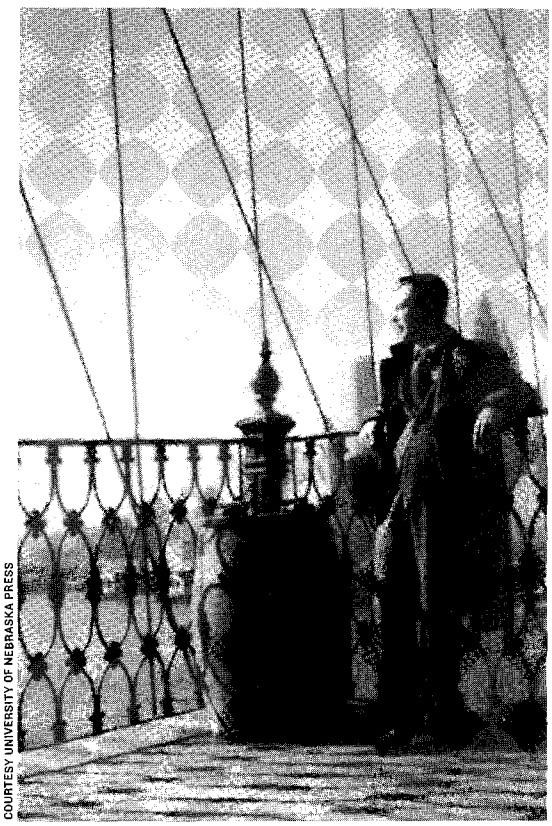
stirring in the small-town dust of Beatrice, Nebraska, hurrying to the nearest big towns (Lincoln, Columbia) and then to the nearest metropolis (Denver), having a disillusioning trawl through Los Angeles, lighting out for the pinnacles of Manhattan and its picnic outing Provincetown, until, suddenly sickened by the east, he buzzes westward like a trapped wasp to the opposite pane of glass, amber with late afternoon. Then, because we always slow the final reel, we see a man driving across the Golden Gate Bridge to take pictures of the lighthouse at Point Reyes, the windiest place on the Pacific coast, the second-foggiest spot in North America, as if to see how far west one might go, how close to actually leaving the continent. And at last the final choice: a new point of the compass—south to Mexico—or further west than ever, to walk along the bridge until, as Reidel says, "there was no land below."

The suicide, which one strives to see beyond, should not add poignancy to the work, and is not explained by the work. Though Kees surely was, as Donald Justice says, "one of the bitterest poets in history," writers as thoroughly unconsoled as Hardy, Frost, Beckett, Larkin, and Ted Hughes all reached a more or less natural end. But Kees's self-destruction forms part of a tragic complex of disappointment and disillusion, the causes of which are many. The puzzle of Kees's talent dwarfs the mystery of his demise. He was unmistakably brilliant. He wrote one shocking and probably immortal poem ("For My Daughter"), a few memorable ones (among them "1926," "The Heat in the Room," "The Smiles of the Bathers," "Aspects of Robinson"), and a great deal of Modernist doggerel. He may well be the most undervalued poet of twentieth-century America, but if he is a major poet—and I toss a coin and say he is—he is one who wrote almost exclusively minor poems.

Why he did so is connected with his time and his place. Kees thought himself unlucky to be born when he was born, into a generation he regarded as "a moldy milieu" in the wake of the golden age of Modernism, while, like many an artistic young soul in the Midwest, he saw salvation in anything but *this*. The former instinct had a negative effect on his natural gifts as a poet; the latter sent him on a spiral of great expectation and grave disillusion, in the east, in the west, in novels, poetry, abstract art, jazz, photography, drama, and film.

He was, in the full sense of the word, uncomfortable. Saul Bellow saw him at parties in New York in the 1940s and thought him "what the French call *sympathique*, very tense, but charming." Alfred Kazin, who encountered him at Yaddo in 1942, remembered him as "unbelievably well informed on the smallest details of modernist literature.... [He] desperately wanted to be 'up there,' as he used to say, with Eliot, Pound, and other stars in our firmament.... [But] despite his frantic ambition to become a 1920s man in the 1940s, Weldon lacked the gaiety, the sporty independence that distinguished American writers when we were growing up." Babette Deutsch, reviewing Kees's first book, *The Last Man*, in 1943, felt that 'one is more aware of the writers whom [he] has pored over ... than his personal evaluation of experience." Kenneth Rexroth thought him "too encumbered with *The Waste Land*."



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***Weldon Kees on the Brooklyn Bridge*, 1948**

What is striking about these opinions is how useful they are now. Anyone who spends some time in the gallery of contemporary American poetry might meet quite a few young men "unbelievably well informed," "too encumbered with *The Waste Land*," or even, I daresay, lacking gaiety and independence. Yet Kees was among the first victims of that phenomenon whereby a poet inherits a radical style or tone and assumes its fitness for duty without necessarily feeling the pressures that forced it into being. (Why many contemporary poets still seem to find the modern metropolis, the automobile, and the skyscraper so alienating that they must no longer say anything clearly or memorably is really not my field.)

In his college days, Kees and his friends divided the world into people who knew who Stephen Dedalus was and people who did not, a line proudly drawn between the chosen and the benighted. Fair enough for a bright spark in what he thinks is the middle of nowhere, but throughout his career Kees rummages indiscriminately in the bric-a-brac of Modernism. A frequent recourse, alas, is Surrealism, which tends to be monotonal, because it fixes writer and reader in a non-negotiable axis and drains words of meaning. In *The Last Man* we find "Eagles with tusks perform in sieves" and "The ectoplasm of Immanuel Kant unwittingly appears" ("Corsage"), while in "Scream as You Leave"—Kees gives up too much in titles—there is "Impromptu unicorns enact ballets,/Applauded by bourgeoisie in negligée." In "A Cornucopia for Daily Use," we are even reunited with some old friends from Eliot's "Sweeney" fragments:

> BONES. The Greek dictionary is there by the cleaver.
> SAMBO. Swell of Lillian to send us these fig newtons.

In such a potpourri of shards and oddities, it can only be a matter of time before "MUMFORD (a dwarf)" arrives on the scene, saying: "One operation and it's as gleaming and shiny as new. *(Leers)*" In Tom DeCillo's film *Living in Oblivion*, a dwarf delivers a brilliant tirade about the fact that actors such as he are only ever required by Hollywood for hallucinations and dream sequences, and you can almost hear him raging over this poem.

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It is not just shopworn Surrealism to which Kees is prone. In his last book, *Poems 1947–1954* (which was vanity published after the commercial houses rejected it for, well, commercial reasons), he drifts into equally Eliotic incantatory philosophizing: *"Being at the expense of Becoming./Becoming at the expense of Being."* But he doesn't seem to know what to do next: "The statue's head falls off, suggesting/That ideal forms may be non-temporal." This begins to feel unfair—how many poets have had to start out with a generation such as Eliot's casting new light and shadow over everything? But the alibi will not hold. Poets as diverse as Lowell, Bishop, Auden, and Dylan Thomas—all born within seven years of Kees—found room to maneuver.

Along with the impulse toward the fragmentary, the strange, and the abstract comes a kind of infernal relish, an assumption that everything to hand is corrupted and irredeemable. Kees may well have felt this way, *Waste Land* or not, but there is something automatic about it, something too quickly acceded to: "Indelible canyons yawn their green/Confusion through the empty air,/And from the pleasant tear-drenched scene,/High-class assassins dash everywhere." That word "pleasant" presumes too much, tries to fix our response without giving us sufficient cause. Sly, and not sly enough. Elsewhere, Kees's voice is that of a relentlessly cynical tour guide in the earpiece:

> The obscene hostess, mincing in the hall,
> Gathers the guests around a crystal ball.
> It is on the whole an exciting moment;
> Mrs. Lefevre stares with her one good eye....

Apart from seeming like a reshuffle of Eliot's deck, this is simply stacked against its subjects, and fails as satire because it never gives them sufficient time or breath in which to be their damnable selves. At the heart of Eliot's Unreal City is "an infinitely gentle infinitely suffering thing." At the heart of Kees's there seems to be a raconteur who believes in nothing anyway, so that when he says sarcastically, "The minister was in fine form that afternoon," the current is weak: what more would we expect from a minister in the world that we have been shown?

Kees's famous "Robinson" poems are also compromised by this constraining tendency. Robinson is Kees's Everyman, an ordinary office worker doing nothing noteworthy, yet screaming all the while from the bottom of his soul. This may, of course, be the poet. The best of the lines are moving and memorable:

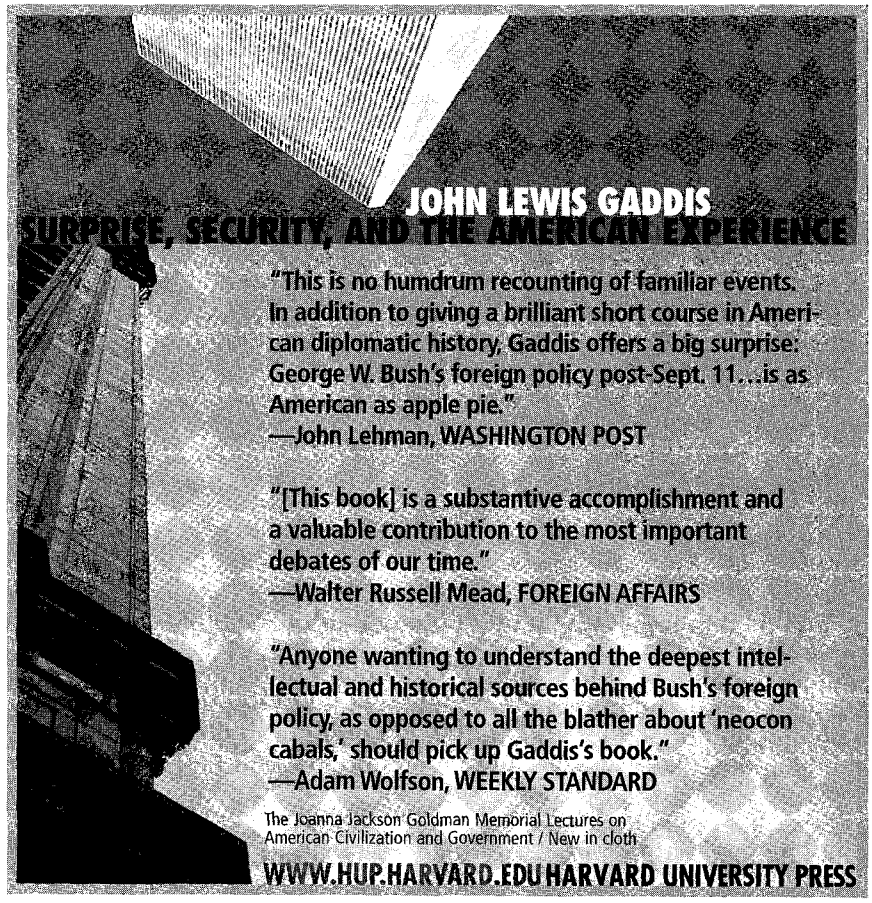
> Robinson walking in the Park,
> admiring the elephant.
> Robinson buying the *Tribune*,
> Robinson buying the *Times*.
> Robinson
> Saying, "Hello. Yes, this is Robinson.
> Sunday
> At five? I'd love to. Pretty well. And you?"
> Robinson alone at Longchamps,
> staring at the wall.

Robinson is meant to be an outline, of course, and if these poems were cartoons, they would be Thurber—they first appeared in *The New Yorker*, a natural home. But the longer the performance, the more questions start to arise. Wouldn't anyone's life seem empty if you looked at it that way—if you sped it up and stripped its little errands of any meaning, and its little pauses of any peace? Everyone's name sounds stupid when you say it six times. You do not prove a man's life pointless by making an inventory of its externals.

And the two later Robinson poems make a grievous error. They catch up with the elusive figure and give him words to say, so that suddenly he is no longer a lost Manhattan soul with a cheap mistress and gambling debts; he is Kees talking about the poem:

> A heretic in catacombs, a famed roué,
> A beggar on the streets, a confidant of Popes—
>
> All these are Robinson in sleep,
> who mumbles as he turns,
> "There is something in this madhouse that I symbolize—
> This city—nightmare—black—"

New York was a madhouse in which Kees did rather well, publishing poems, exhibiting paintings, dashing off newsreel copy for Paramount in what he called the Grime and Strife Building. Katinka Loeser, reviewing *The Last Man* for *Poetry* in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1943, voiced an unpalatable truth: "Some rather pleasant things will happen to many of us, if we are as realistic about the postwar world as we are about the present catastrophe." This is neither irresponsible nor blinkered; it is an intelligent deduction from the historical situation. But it certainly doesn't chime with Modernist sensibility, where vague spiritual malaise is always an allowable stand-in for actual suffering. And Kees's view of the world beyond America—a world he never saw—begs a few questions.

"I say, why should we become
involved?" Herendeen persisted.
"Because something will be in
jeopardy."
"What?"
"I don't know. Something"

One only needed to read the papers in 1941 to know what was in jeopardy. The publisher to whom Kees sent this novel read it within hours of the United States' declaring war on Japan, so that, as Reidel says, it "became a period piece inside of a day." When it was rejected Kees was nonplussed, and wrote to a friend: "Jesus, Norris, I just feel as though I'd told my favorite joke and nobody even smiled." This is not the only time Kees seems adrift of daily reality, cocooned in his sense of the literary. In the antiwar poem "June 1940," Kees corrals "Flaubert and Henry James and Owen ... Rilke and Lawrence, Joyce" into his corner, as "those who were trapped by hysteria once before," as if they had all faced the same threat and responded the same way. "An idiot wind is blowing; the conscience dies" probably sounded smarter in 1940 than it did in 1945.

Reidel says that Kees's "job [at Paramount] had intensified his already cynical view of leaders and the anguished consequences of the proud and irreversible decisions they handed down from their seats of power," citing the company's heavily censored footage of the ailing Roosevelt at Yalta; but if this was the worst example of "anguished consequences" of "irreversible decisions" that Kees could find in the 1940s, then he wasn't looking very hard. A poet who can describe the offices of *Newsweek* and *Look* as "Dachaus with telephones, Siberias with bonuses" isn't even thinking. (In Kees's defense, an abstract artist can usually trump a poet for fatuity, and Mark Rothko obliged in the summer of 1949, saying he felt nothing on seeing film of the death camps, because it had nothing to do with him. Kees said: "What you mean, Mark, is that you're a moral dwarf.")

Once, in Nebraska, where Kees was reluctantly earning his corn working on a state guide for the Federal Writers' Project, he saw a woman on the sidewalk whipping her son. "Hit him again, ma'am!" he shouted. "Beat him with a stick until his teeth fall out! He's just a little fellow who can't hurt you." Here is the true note of his sorrow, ever clinging to a sarcastic shrug. The bitterness in Kees is not a sense of meaninglessness or nihilism; it is an exhaustion in the face of too much meaning, a thick sigh of understanding that to be good in the world is to suffer. Kees sounds inauthentic only when his poems pretend that the universe is drained of right and wrong, that there is nothing to do but tour the rubble, but it is what so many of them do. Also in that tiny vignette—and all Reidel's quotes from Kees speaking aloud are gripping—is the clue to his brilliance, and the key that gets us into the ten or twelve beautiful things he made in his short career: Kees was a genius of the moment, the moment of sight, of local contemplation, of distant recall.

The porchlight coming on again,
Early November, the dead leaves
Raked in piles, the wicker swing
Creaking. Across the lots
A phonograph is playing *Ja-Da*.

This is the first of the three stanzas of "1926." Here Kees draws a border around experience: the act of memory is the outer frame, the remembered light is the inner frame. There is no abstract musing, nothing unreal or surreal, no grandstanding, no digression, no scorn; there is just the unbearable pathos of time contained in the first utterance, the wonder that gapes at the end of each short line, waiting for the memory to take another shy step forward into the light. And there is the poignancy of the finishing detail: "I am back from seeing Milton Sills / And Doris Kenyon. Twelve years old. / The porchlight coming on again."

Equally impressive is "The Upstairs Room," and for similar reasons. The poem is visually contained in what the poet can see at a certain point, what he can plausibly muse on only and at precisely that point, and how those thoughts might develop. It simply rides on the breath, stops and goes where it has to:

It must have been in March the rug
wore through.
Now the day passes and I stare
At warped pine boards my father's
father nailed,
At the twisted grain.

How the dizzying drop of time held in "father's father" takes his breath away, shortens the last line, lets the eye simply fall upon the pattern and linger! Kees's ability to render such moments illuminates several short poems fully, and in longer ones it flickers in and out of view, giving rise to an unevenness perhaps unparalleled in twentieth-century poetry. In "Travels in North America," Kees is suddenly able to shake off both the shrug of the raconteur and the chant of the mystic, and produce this:

... At three or four,
On winter afternoons, when school is
letting out
And rows of children pass you, near
the firehouse,
This sense is keenest, piercing as the
wind
That sweeps you toward the frosted
door of your hotel
And past the portly hatted traveler
with moist cigar
Who turns his paper as you brush
against the rubber plant.

This is focus of the first order—the indefinite rushing gray of the early lines, the way "school is letting out" tugs at the heart that never left the place, the Anglo-Saxon spell of a compound like "firehouse," then the gradual slowing and warming towards the specific: it is light that frosts the door of the hotel, the light of shelter, but with the cold ("frosted") of being far from home; the ineffable loneliness of "moist" cigar, the afternoon's hopes sinking to fatigue against the absurdity of a "rubber plant." But within a few lines the lamp is switched off again: "Journeys are ways of marking out a distance, / Or dealing with the past, however ineffectually."

Early in the 1950s, Kees wrote to his parents in response to their general dismay at his recent actions, such as leaving New York (and his "real" jobs at Paramount and *Time*), starting work in a psy-

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chiatric clinic in San Francisco (which they felt was beneath him), and continuing to dabble in the art world. Reidel writes: "At a time when everyone seemed to have a job and there was so much prosperity, Kees's straits just did not make sense, and [they] felt there was enough time for him to change, even to drop poetry and painting altogether." This is pretty wretched stuff for a thirty-eight-year-old to go through, especially one who had once published and exhibited to acclaim, and Kees's reply—"[I thought] that both you and John took pride in my accomplishments"—is harrowing.

And yet the exasperation of a conventional old couple from the Midwest—that Kees would not focus—strikes a faint but recognizable chord with a reader fifty years later. The pattern of his life kept repeating like a sestina. He would arrive in a new place, throw himself into artistic enterprises, write, read, exhibit, perform, organize, socialize. He would briefly be part of some group loosely clustered to an artistic principle. Then he would weary of it, want out, get out, and leave the place behind for good. At some level he was always a child of the plains, thinking of bright lights just over the horizon, and then, disillusioned in their glare, fleeing—as he fled New York for the last time—what he called the "dark and dreadful place." At about the same time Kees was in San Francisco, setting up a revue called *Poets' Follies*, described in the local press as "a bouillabaisse of literate ambiguities, pratfalls, dixieland and just horsing around," Auden was writing this about "Plains":

> And think of growing where all
> elsewheres are equal!
> So long as there's a hill-ridge
> somewhere the dreamer
> Can place his land of marvels; in poor
> valleys
> Orphans can head downstream to
> seek a million:
> Here nothing points; to choose
> between Art and Science
> An embryo genius would have to
> spin a stick.

In the nightmare with which Auden concludes the poem, he says he has "tried to run, knowing there was no hiding and no help."

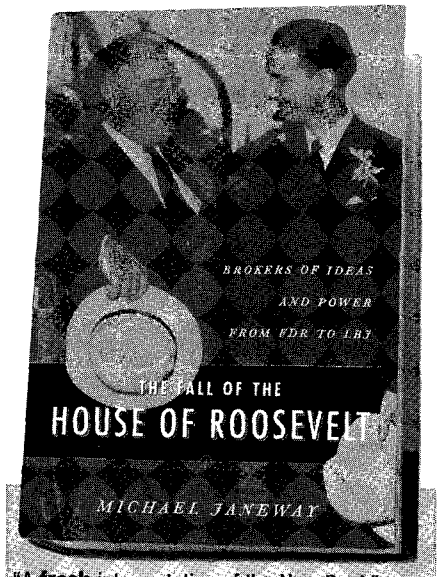
When one reads Kees's finest poem, "For My Daughter," one can close one's eyes and strain to forget about the outcome, strive not to foresee; yet it is still hard not to catch the eyes of the other guests, sip one's wine in an uneasy silence, and wonder if, indeed, there was no hiding and no help:

> Looking into my daughter's eyes I
> read
> Beneath the innocence of morning
> flesh
> Concealed, hintings of death she
> does not heed.
> Coldest of winds have blown this hair,
> and mesh
> Of seaweed snarled these miniatures
> of hands;
> The night's slow poison, tolerant and
> bland,
> Has moved her blood. Parched years
> that I have seen
> That may be hers appear: foul,
> lingering
> Death in certain war, the slim legs
> green.
> Or, fed on hate, she relishes the sting
> Of others' agony; perhaps the cruel
> Bride of a syphilitic or a fool.
> These speculations sour in the sun.
> I have no daughter. I desire none.

This is probably the most formally conventional poem that Kees ever wrote. It is sonnet-length, pentametrical, and full-rhymed to a fairly regular scheme. But it is virtually the only time he writes in such a linear form: his shapes are habitually circular—sestinas, villanelles, jazzed-up rounds and nursery rhymes—his meter relaxed, flexible. So often does Kees move in circles or spirals that it is no surprise to find the last, very short poem of his last book ("Small Prayer") contemplating two such smoldering zeroes, the "dead clock" and the "old sun." But "For My Daughter" is two times shocking: once because of the unflinchingly bleak X-ray of his own child's possible future, twice because there is no child. One tends to remember reading this poem for the first time. It belongs to a haunting little gallery of inescapable poems, poems to be coped with. They may not be the greatest poems of the last century, but without having read them one is not equipped to know what that century was. (Larkin's "Aubade" is in this company, as is Hecht's "Behold the lilies of the field.")

What is to be coped with here? That language can do anything, can speak beautifully from the depths of the soul and turn out to be fibbing? The sonnet is the most engraved of forms for a poet. The poet knows exactly how far in he is, and how far there is to go. A sense of a coming reckoning grips one somewhere around the tenth line, a sense that time is running out and something must be done. Things must converge, be dealt with, some memorable chord has got to be played. Of course it is only the life and death of Weldon Kees that makes the poem seem more and more like a man walking along a jut of shore to the water's edge, and ready to keep on walking when there's no land left. But these speculations sour in the sun. ■

"New Deal **Confidential**"*



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NEW YORK DIARIST

Black Gold

"A FUEL SHORTAGE? IN Iraq?" I could not believe what I was hearing. It was November 1997, and I was accompanying Benon Sevan, the executive director of the U.N. Oil-for-Food Program, on his first visit to Iraq. Fresh from the ivory tower, and fully committed to the principles of the U.N. Charter, I had only recently joined the United Nations as a coordination officer—a kind of all-purpose special assistant. The news of a sudden fuel shortage was especially frustrating, given that my boss was scheduled to travel to Iraqi Kurdistan the next day. How could a country with the world's second-largest fuel reserve suddenly run out of gas?

THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT HAD SABOTAGED our work in the north at every turn, delaying the transit of critical supplies and withholding travel permits for our staff. So, initially, I assumed this fuel shortage was just another ploy. But I was wrong. There really was a fuel shortage. And, after we managed to get to the northern border with Turkey, using Toyota Land Cruisers equipped with double fuel tanks, I saw the source of the problem: Hundreds of trucks were lining up at the border crossing to smuggle Iraqi fuel into Turkey, in clear violation of U.N. sanctions. The trade was so profitable to Saddam Hussein's cronies that it left no fuel for Iraq's own gas stations.

AT THE INITIATIVE OF THE CLINTON ADministration, the U.N. arranged a formal hearing with the commanders of the U.S. interception forces in the Persian Gulf, who provided the Security Council Sanctions Committee with all the details of Saddam's smuggling. Beyond the trucks going through Turkey and Jordan, and a pipeline through Syria, Iraqi smugglers were using Iranian waters to send ships out into the Persian Gulf, making them difficult to intercept. Yet, after hearing all the facts, the U.N. Sanctions Committee decided to "remain seized of the matter," which is U.N.-speak for letting it rot.

THEN, IN 2000, WE LEARNED—FIRST from rumors, then from testimonials—that Saddam had opened up a second front against the sanctions regime: the extortion of kickbacks from his Oil-for-Food trading partners. The clearest indications came when companies complained to the United Nations that Iraq was asking them to inflate their prices by 10 percent (sometimes more) and to deposit the difference into Saddam's bank accounts. In one instance, a Swedish manufacturer called seeking help after being pressured to give kickbacks. But, after an internal exchange of memos up and down the U.N. hierarchy, which can best be described as Kafkaesque, the company was simply told to take up the matter with its own government. (If nothing else, this gives lie to the U.N. claim that it had "learned of the 10 percent kickback scheme only after the end of major combat operations" in 2003.)

THE PROBLEM WITH THIS APPROACH WAS that the whole point of U.N. oversight was to make sure no money flowed into Saddam's pockets. If the system failed to stop the kickbacks, why was the world spending close to $1 billion to fund it? In total, the General Accounting Office estimates that Saddam skimmed some $4.4 billion off the program. Add that to the $5.7 billion Saddam earned from smuggling, and it's a bit of an understatement to call the U.N. sanctions regime "porous."

AND OUR FAILURE TO SPEAK OUT AGAINST Saddam wasn't limited to smuggling and kickbacks. We failed to speak out when the Iraqi government made threats against U.N. staff, when it conducted ethnic cleansing in the areas around Mosul and Kirkuk, and when it sought to use Oil-for-Food money to import items clearly intended for the leadership (like material to build a multimillion dollar stadium, and radio and TV equipment for the Baathist propaganda machine). When international weapons inspectors were barred from visiting certain sites, they whipped out video cameras and provoked an international crisis. But our humanitarian observers were easily discouraged. They were constantly accompanied by Iraqi minders, and, when the Iraqi authorities wanted to keep them out of an area, they simply announced that no minder was available for the trip. On the rare occasions when a U.N. official actually complained, he was usually expelled from the country. (The expulsion was technically illegal under Chapter VII of the U.N. charter. But, once the Iraqi authorities said they could "no longer guarantee the security" of a given person, that person knew he had better pack quickly.) In any case, these criticisms were never aired in public. Had there been the will to generate just one news headline saying, "THE U.N. ACCUSES SADDAM OF CORRUPTING OIL-FOR-FOOD," it's hard to imagine the United Nations would be in the mess it is today.

AT THE ROOT OF MANY OF THESE PROBlems was the unwillingness of U.N. officials to distinguish between the interests of the Iraqi people and the interests of the Iraqi state—which, to be fair, is a distinction the U.N. charter also fails to draw. For example, U.N. humanitarian workers pleaded with the Iraqi government to spend Oil-for-Food money on special protein biscuits for vulnerable groups, such as widowed mothers. But the government resisted, preferring instead to purchase commodities, such as wheat, of which there was no shortage but whose distribution enhanced the power of the state. The United Nations hardly objected.

IT'S ENCOURAGING THAT U.N. SECRETARYGeneral Kofi Annan has appointed Paul Volcker, the former chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve and a man of unquestioned integrity, to head an independent investigation into the Oil-for-Food Program. (Among other things, Volcker will investigate whether officials like Sevan accepted kickbacks themselves. Based on my experience, I think it's unlikely.) But, given the muddled U.N. mandate and the failure of U.N. officials to take meaningful responsibility for the organization's failures (it's almost impossible to be fired for incompetence at the United Nations), it's hardly surprising that this move has yet to appease Kurdish and Shia leaders on the Iraqi Governing Council, several of whom do not see the United Nations as a legitimate manager of their transition to democracy. Until the culture of the United Nations changes, they'd be foolish to believe otherwise.

MICHAEL SOUSSAN

Michael Soussan was program coordinator for the U.N. Oil-for-Food Program.

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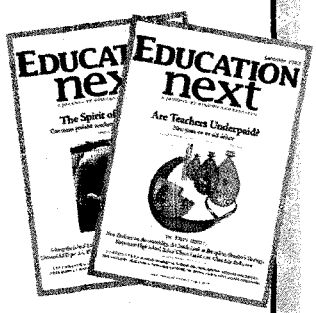
No Child Left Behind: How to Ace Those Tests

INTERESTED IN CUTTING-EDGE IDEAS ABOUT K–12 EDUCATION?



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One reason that the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act is important and promising is that it focuses on reading. By the same token, one reason that NCLB sometimes distorts education for the worse is that it focuses on reading. The paradox arises from the fact that **our schools do not yet fully understand what they need to do to raise reading scores**. Many have accepted that phonics is best taught systematically. That's a plus. But goaded by the new law, many schools are intensively doing counterproductive things like strategy exercises and test prep that can not significantly improve reading comprehension.

Reading is the key to most academic achievement. Hence the emphasis of NCLB is welcome, as is its insistence on accountability through student tests. For, despite the chorus of complaints about standard reading tests, they are very reliable: they correlate highly with each other, and they accurately measure real-world reading ability.

The negative, unintended consequences of NCLB have emerged, not so much from the law itself but from the failure of our schools of education to instruct teachers and administrators in the true nature of reading achievement. Anxious educators have turned elementary schools into test-prep factories. In California, for example, the state has mandated that students spend at least 150 minutes each day on reading in the early grades. A great deal of this time is spent on trivial tales and on constantly repeated content-poor exercises in "classifying" and "finding the main idea." The desperate response of the schools to test pressure has been to excise history, science, and the arts and replace them with still more such exercises in reading. This is a futile strategy since reading achievement depends on broad knowledge of history, science, and the arts. The dull exercises in "comprehension strategies," which have been shown to be largely useless, take up great stretches of time in all the reading programs. Hence the small initial rise in reading scores yielded by these intense, misguided efforts will level off to everyone's disappointment. Reader, you first read that prediction here!

There is a way to avoid this self-defeating consequence of focusing on "reading." Within the long stretches of time allocated to reading, **schools should start teaching a solid, cumulative curriculum that replaces the time now being devoted to trivial content and fruitless comprehension exercises**. This approach to reading would spend long, coherent stretches of time on such topics as the early civil rights movement, the biology of farming, the nature of magnetism, and the geography of Africa.

Under this new sort of reading instruction (which is really very old) students would not be prepped for reading tests per se because, beyond learning how to take tests in general, there is no way you can specially prep for a reading test. If strategic test prep worked, our students' scores would now be a lot better than they are. No, the way to prep for a reading test is to gain broad knowledge. The classroom tests we give our students should be tests of the coherent knowledge they are being taught. Giving them that kind of test semester after semester will gradually raise their scores on standard reading tests. In time it will raise them dramatically. In fact, there is no other way of raising those reading scores dramatically.

—E. D. Hirsch Jr.

E. D. Hirsch Jr. is a distinguished visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution and a member of the Koret Task Force on K–12 Education. Hirsch is also the founder and chairman of the nonprofit Core Knowledge Foundation.

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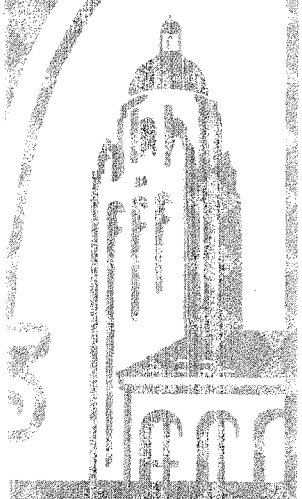

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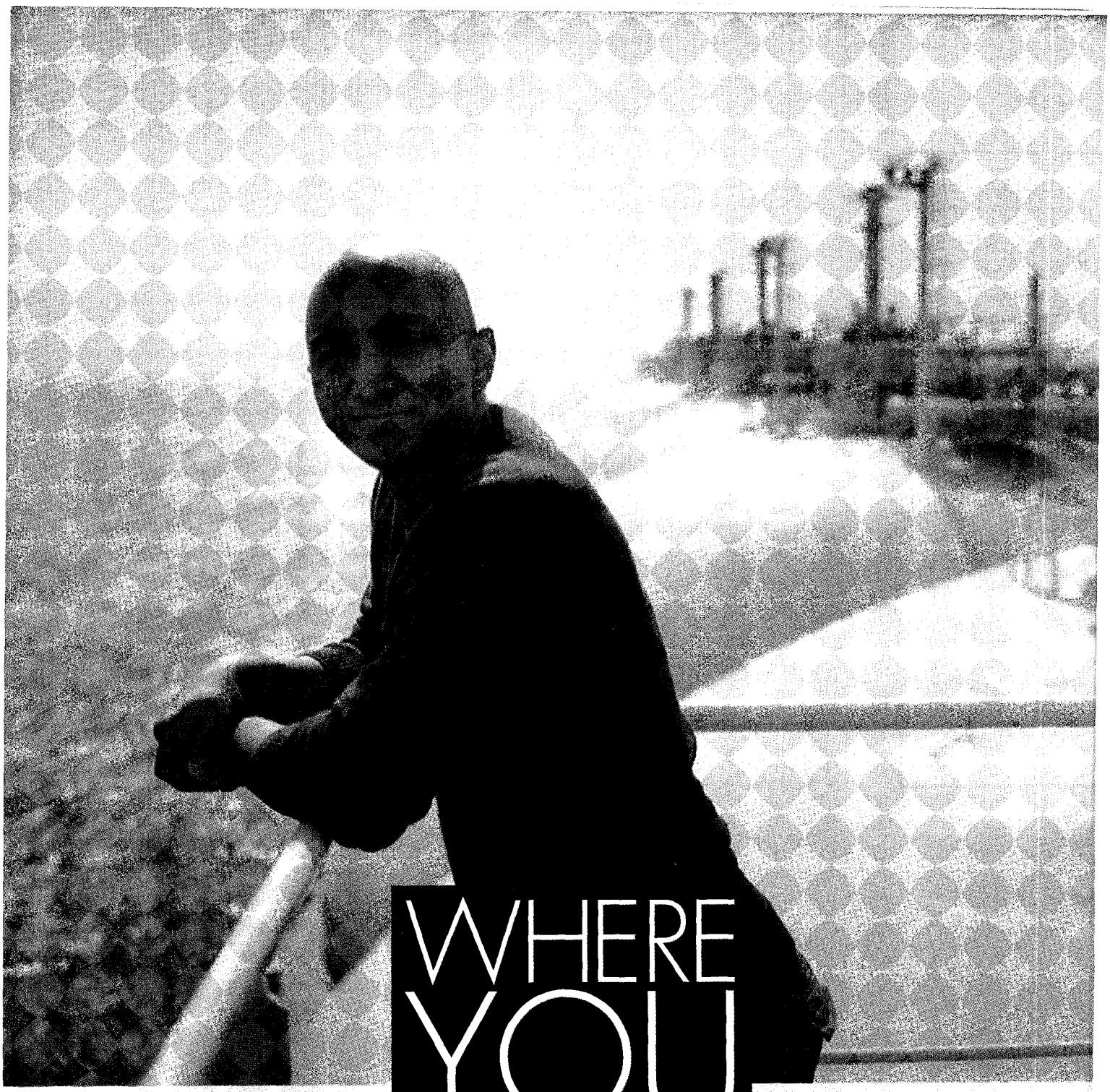

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